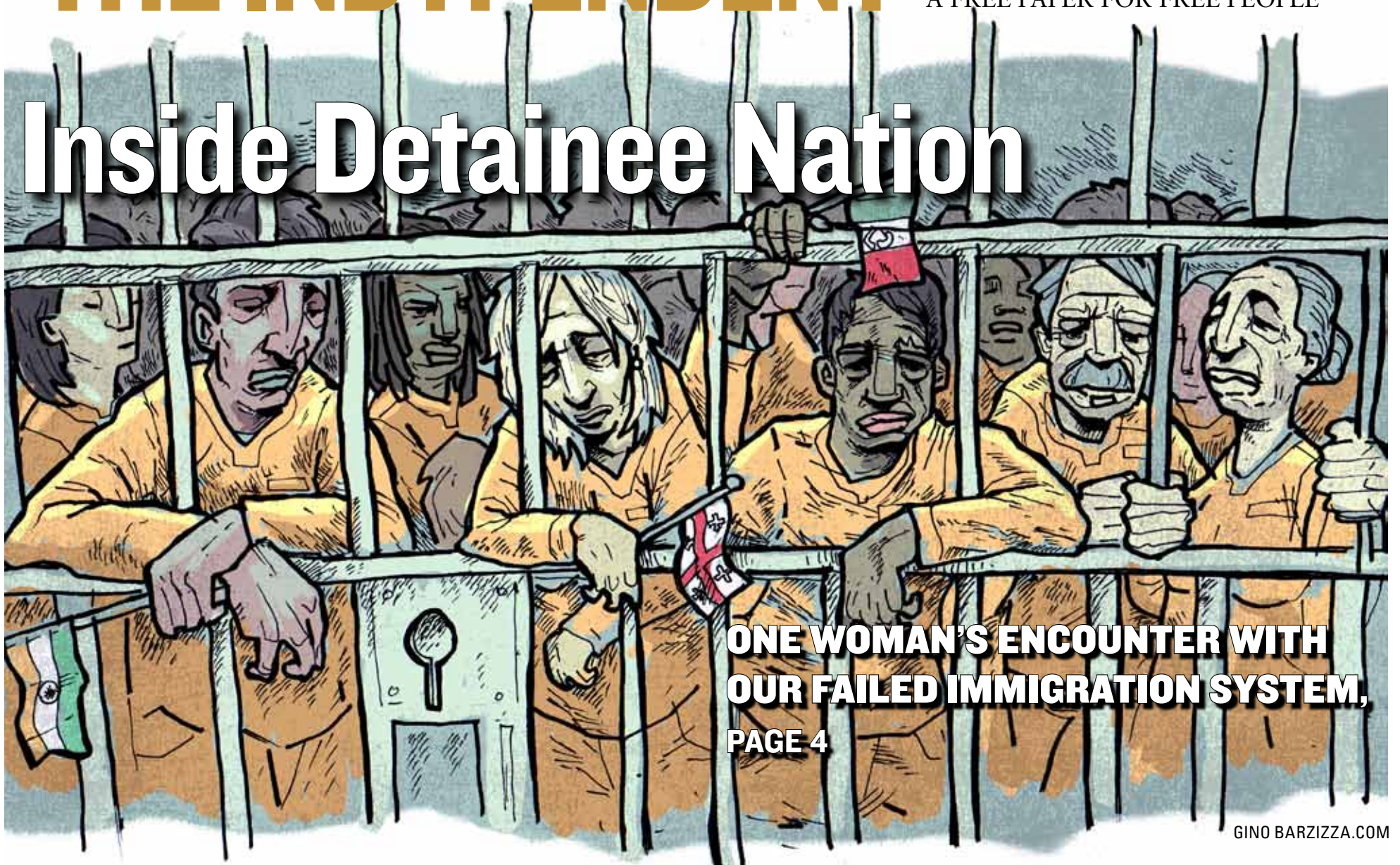


THE INDYPENDENT

Issue #150 April 21-May 11, 2010
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

Inside Detainee Nation



**ONE WOMAN'S ENCOUNTER WITH
OUR FAILED IMMIGRATION SYSTEM,
PAGE 4**



**DISSECTING
OBAMACARE, p7**



When the MTA cuts student fares, they're not going your way.

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The Independent is a New York-based free newspaper published 16 times a year on Wednesdays to our print and online readership of more than 200,000. It is produced by a network of volunteers who report, write, edit, draw, design, take photos, distribute, fundraise and provide website management. Since 2000, more than 650 citizen journalists, artists and media activists have participated in this project. Winner of more than 50 New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Independent* is dedicated to empowering people to create a true alternative to the corporate press by encouraging people to produce their own media. The Independent is funded by subscriptions, reader donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of people locally and globally. The Independent reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

The Independent is affiliated with the New York City Independent Media Center, which is part of the global Indymedia movement, an international network that is dedicated to fostering grassroots media production, and to *IndyKids*, a children's newspaper. NYC IMC is an open publishing website where anyone can publish news (nyc.indymedia.org.)

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AND FOLLOW OUR BLOGGERS ONLINE EVERY
DAY AT INDYPENDENT.ORG!

community calendar

Please send events to indyevents@gmail.com.

FRI APRIL 23-MON MAY 3

TOUR: SEA SHEPHERD. Come tour the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society's flagship, the Steve Irwin, while it is docked in New York City before leaving to confront Bluefin tuna poachers. Tours will run daily from 10 am-3 pm. To participate in the onshore volunteer team, email nyc@seashepherd.org. For location details, visit website listed below. 360-370-5650 • seashepherd.org

SUN APRIL 25

7pm • Free
READING: EL MONSTRUO AND IRAQIGIRL. Join John Ross for a reading from his book *El Monstruo: Dread and Redemption in Mexico City* and the book *IraqiGirl: Diary of a Teenage Girl in Iraq*, which he edited. Bluestockings Books, 172 Allen St 212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

MON APRIL 26

7pm • Free
SCREENING: THE COCA-COLA CASE. Come to the New York premiere of the film that Coca-Cola, Co. tried to censor. All those attending will receive a free DVD or Stop Killer Coke T-shirt, as long as supplies last. Tishman Auditorium, NYU School of Law Vanderbilt Hall, 40 Washington Sq South 718-852-2808 • law.nyu.edu

TUE APRIL 27

6pm • Free
OPEN HOUSE: MEET THE INDYPENDENT. Come check out our new office and mingle with *Indypendent* editors and volunteers. Light refreshments will be served. 666 Broadway, Suite 500 212-904-1282 contact@indypendent.org

THU APRIL 29

4pm • Free
MARCH ON WALL STREET. Join protesters in demanding accountability from Wall Street and an end to predatory lending. City Hall Park, Chambers St (btw Broadway and Park Row) 212-777-6040 • aflcio.org

7-8pm • Free
READING: BUSTMAGAZINE'S SPOKEN WORD EXTRAVAGANZA. This reading will be hosted by poet and *BUST* writer

Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz and will feature poetry by a National Book Award nominee, a Golden Globe nominee and a Women of the World Poetry Slam champion. Strand Book Store, 828 Broadway 212-473-1452 • strandbooks.com

FRI APRIL 30

7pm • Free
DISCUSSION: GREEN GONE WRONG. Author and Demos Senior Fellow Heather Rogers and climatologist James Hansen will discuss "green products" and Rogers' new book, *Green Gone Wrong: How Our Economy is Undermining the Environmental Revolution.* RSVP online. CUNY Graduate Center, Proshanky Auditorium, 365 Fifth Ave 212-633-1405 • emos.org

SAT MAY 1

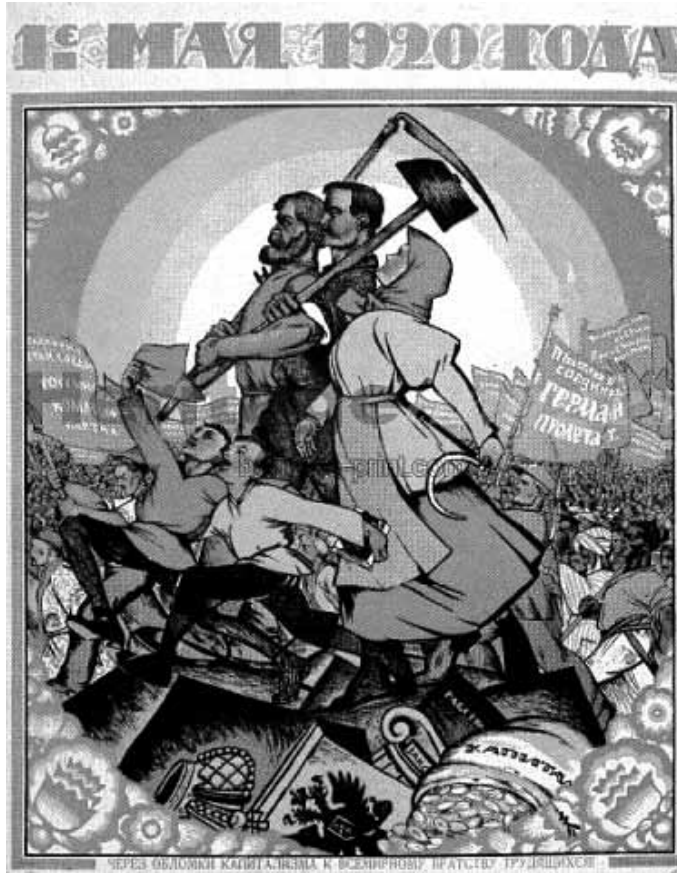
9am-5pm • Free
EVENT: BRONX FOOD SUMMIT. The first Bronx Food Summit will feature workshops on where to find, prepare and grow healthy food in the Bronx. Register online. Hostos Community College 500 Grand Concourse, Bronx 718-590-3500 bronxboropres.nyc.gov/bronxfood.html

Noon • Free
RALLY: IMMIGRANT RIGHTS. The 6th annual May Day march and rally for worker and immigrant rights will be held at Union Square. 212-633-6646 • may1.info

1-7pm • Free
FAIR: ZINE AND SMALL PRESS. Support zines and small presses in New York. This event features readings, live music and a puppet show. Ding Dong Lounge, 929 Columbus Ave maydaydingdong.blogspot.com dingdongtable@gmail.com

TUE MAY 4

5pm • Free
ACTION: KEEP AMERICA MOVING. Join the Transport Workers Union and other labor activists for Keep America Moving's first Day of Action for affordable mass transit. Penn Station, Eighth Ave and 33rd St 347-739-4376 • keepamericamoving.org



THU MAY 6

9am-6pm • Free
PROTEST: STOP MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL. JP Morgan Chase funds the devastating coal-mining process known as mountaintop removal, which pollutes water and air and destroys wilderness. Protests will be held at Chase branches, offices and ATMs across the country. 1-800-989-RAIN • dirtymoney.org

SUN MAY 2

1:30pm • Free
RALLY: NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION. Leaders from across the globe will convene at the United Nations to discuss nuclear non-proliferation. Join us and march to demand a nuclear-free future. Meet at Seventh Ave and 41st St and march down 42nd St to U.N. Headquarters. The event will close with the International Peace and Music Festival in Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, 47th St, btwn First and Second Ave. peaceandjusticenow.org

SAT MAY 15

12-5pm • Free
FAIR: BROOKLYN PEACE FAIR. Sponsored by Brooklyn for Peace, the fair will feature 100 community organizations and will include a talk by the founder of SOA Watch, Fr. Roy Bourgeois, and performances by SpiritChild, MetroSonics and more. Brooklyn College Campus, 2900 Bedford Ave, Bklyn 718-624-5921 • brooklynforpeace.org

SUN MAY 16

12pm • Free
PARADE: VEGGIE PRIDE. Come celebrate animal rights and vegetarian and vegan lifestyles at the third annual Veggie Pride Parade. The procession will start in the West Village at noon with participants marching to the north end of Union Square, where exhibitors, speakers and live music will follow. 212-242-0011 • veggieprideparade.org

reader comments

Post your own comments online at the end of each article or email letters@indypendent.org.

NUCLEAR THREAT

Response to "Resisting the Nuclear Boom," April 2:

I can't believe that after 40 years of fighting the nuclear industry, I now have to fight my environmental brethren, too. Nuclear power is not an option to fight climate change. It is expensive, dangerous, you have to bury the waste deep underground, and nuclear plants are terrorist targets and permanent financial welfare cases. They are the last choice.

—KLEM

Whether we mine it here in the United States or somewhere else, nuclear power is going to

increase worldwide. There are plenty of places to mine that are not near American Indian lands. —DONDONSURVELO

WHALES AT RISK

Response to "Cetacean Nation: Ocean Warriors Fight for Endangered Whales," April 2:

The whalers hunt minke whales, which are by no means endangered. The Icelandic and Norwegian ships hunt fin whales, yet you make no mention of them at all, and Sea Shepherd completely ignored them after being kicked out of that part of the ocean.

—JON ANDERSON

The issue is larger than you and me. There are species of animals being completely wiped out, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species has failed, and the only one trying to make a real difference is the Sea Shepherd. Japan has no regard for wildlife or its protections. The ocean is in trouble, and the only thing the government is worried about is who is going to get the most resources out of it and they don't seem to care about protecting it at all. Let's stand up for our oceans, whether it be Sea Shepherd or Greenpeace. Let's just make a difference.

—STOP AND THINK

OLYMPICS IN BRAZIL

Response to "Brazilian Crackdown: It's Giuliani-Time as Rio de Janeiro Goes for the Gold," April 2:

It's amazing when the Olympics come to a city, civil and human rights are thrown out the window. There was a strong protest movement for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Canada, contesting the large number of homes and neighborhoods that were decimated by the government to accommodate the games. But you didn't hear much about the detrimental effects the Olympics have on the local community.

—AKOSUA REED

New Editors Join THE INDYPENDENT

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

Renée Feltz is a savvy reporter who has spent the past decade bringing forward marginalized voices. Kate Perkins most recently worked as managing editor of *N+1*, a witty, provocative magazine of cultural criticism. Now, both women



RENÉE FELTZ

are joining *The Independent* to oversee the paper's international and culture sections.

Feltz's background as a journalist includes co-founding the Houston Independent Media Center and working four years as the news director for Pacifica Radio station KPFT in Houston.

"Our motto there was local news in a global context," Feltz said. "Now I hope to tweak that idea and feature international news in a way that is relevant to our local and national readers."

Feltz is also the co-producer of the award-winning website businessofdetention.com, and has reported extensively on immigration enforcement programs dogged by human rights abuses. She expects this will shape her reporting on international migration set into motion by global warming, war and poverty linked to U.S. trade policies.

Most recently she worked as a multimedia web producer at PBS *Wide Angle*, a weekly international current affairs show, and is excited to keep presenting global stories.

She hopes to tap into networks of independent journalists around the world who

are able to tell stories from the perspective of those most affected by issues and events.

"So much of the international news we read in this country comes from the business press, which emphasizes corporate interests," Feltz said. "This leaves the field wide open for *The Independent* to reach readers who seek a broader perspective on the world."

Kate Perkins interned at *The Independent* in the summer of 2004, writing book and music reviews while helping distribute the paper all over the city in the run-up to the Republican National Convention.

"It was a totally exhilarating punk-rock atmosphere," recalled Perkins who said she was radicalized by the experience. "Everybody was working their heart out all the time. And the topics being covered and the way they were being covered challenged my liberal-progressive values."

Perkins subsequently returned to New York after finishing college. She worked as an editorial assistant at Verso Books from 2006 to 2008 and was managing editor of *N+1* from 2008 to 2009. Now, she is ready for a great second act as she returns to *The Independent* to head up its culture section.

"I'm impressed with how far the *Indy* has come in terms of its size and scope and



KATE PERKINS

quality," said Perkins, a guitarist who plays in a "weird pop" band and is pursuing a master's degree in philosophy at The New School. "It's like seeing a kid at four years old who is now 10 and feeling blown away."

Perkins said she would like to push the boundaries of what is typically thought of as culture. Along with the fine arts — music, film, theater, dance, literature and visual artistic practice — she is interested in bringing to the fore questions of social space, land and property, universities and education, technology, sexuality, environment, energy, food and resources, without reducing them to isolated categories.

"I'm committed to using *The Independent*'s strong tradition of ideology-busting political journalism as a template for cultural coverage," Perkins said. "The ideal culture section merges critical aesthetics with social context and a deep awareness of the multiple communities it strives to cover and reflect."

To contact Renée Feltz, email renee@indypendent.org. To contact Kate Perkins, email kate@indypendent.org.

THE INDY'S NEW HOME

The Independent recently moved into a new home on 666 Broadway in Lower Manhattan. The paper now shares an office space with the Funding Exchange, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice and People's Production House, a media justice organization that trains immigrants and youth of color in radio production skills.

"It's great to be working alongside other organizations with strong grassroots social justice missions," said *Independent* Coordinator Jessica Lee. "As we begin our 10th year, this is the perfect place for us to continue to grow and flourish."

The Independent will celebrate its new home with an open house on Tuesday, May 18, from 5 to 7 p.m. Light refreshments will be served. Afterwards, it will hold its Tuesday night volunteer editorial meeting. To find out more about how to get involved in *The Independent*, call 212-904-1282 or email contact@indypendent.org.

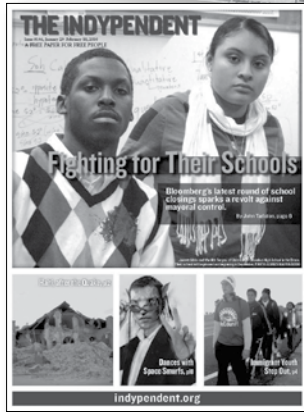
SUMMER INTERNSHIPS!

Looking for an internship with real responsibilities and the opportunity to cover stories that matter? *The Independent* is accepting applications for its summer internship program through Friday, May 14. People of color, women and LGBT persons are strongly encouraged to apply. For more information, email internships@indypendent.org or call 212-904-1282.

THE INDY AT 150

In September 2000, a small independent group of New York-based artists, activists and independent journalists launched a gritty, four-page black-and-white newspaper that aspired, in its own words, to "build media democracy by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues which affect all communities."

One-hundred and fifty issues later, *The Independent* is flourishing. Thanks to the hard work of hundreds of volunteers and the generous support of our readers over the years, *The Independent* has become an award-winning four-color, 16- to 20-page paper that is published every third Wednesday. We are distributed across the five boroughs and online at indypendent.org to a total audience of 200,000 readers per issue.



THEN AND NOW:
Issue #2, October, 2000;
Issue #146, February, 2010

The need for powerful alternative media voices has never been more urgent and as we go forward we promise you, our reader, two things: 1) we will continue to be a paper of, by and for the people that always stands ready to speak truth to power and 2) we will work every day to make *The Independent* more informative, more compelling and more relevant to your life.

We believe our best work lies ahead of us, and there is one thing we are certain of: With your continued support, anything is possible.

THE INDYPENDENT NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT!

☐ I would like to make a contribution to *The Independent* of ☐ \$100 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$25 ☐ \$ _____ ☐ \$ _____ /month sustaining gift

☐ I would like to subscribe to *The Independent*, 17 issues for only \$25

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City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Telephone _____

☐ My check payable to *The Independent* is enclosed

☐ Please charge my credit card ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard

Card Number _____ Exp _____ Card Code _____

Cardholder _____ Signature _____



Please return this form to: The Independent, P.O. Box 1417, New York, NY 10276. You can always visit indypendent.org to make a donation online — tell your friends!

“Everything Is Not Fine”

THE IMMIGRANT DETENTION SYSTEM IS RUINING THE LIVES OF INNOCENT PEOPLE

BY DIANA STEWART

The long, windowless one-story warehouse blends into an industrial zone near Newark Liberty International Airport. But this building is not storing boxes of things: it is storing living, breathing human beings who yearn to be free and to return to their heartbroken families.

As I head inside the Elizabeth, NJ Detention Center (EDC), I see mothers pushing babies in strollers to visit their fathers before they are deported. Once inside, I present the number of the detainee I am scheduled to meet, I relinquish my ID and wait. Then, empty-handed, I go through the security check, stepping inside the lock-up room. The sound of the heavy door clanging shut makes it clear: This is not a “detention center,” but undeniably a prison.

For a few moments, I stand between two worlds, unable to escape. The door on the other side opens and I step into the visitors’ room. It is organized into booths with chairs and a single phone on each side of a Plexiglas barrier that separates visitors and detainees.

I pick up the phone on my side of the booth. The statuesque 19-year-old college student from Africa takes the phone on her side. She is so happy to have a visitor. She wants me to know that it is an important job that we volunteers are doing to lift their spirits. She has been detained at EDC for two months, waiting for her community college visa to come through. I try to put on a poker face to hide my shock. She seems so young to be incarcerated — and for no good reason.

“What keeps you going?” I ask.

“I know that God must have put me here to protect me from something really horrible on the outside,” she replies.

I take a deep breath. “I’m glad that your faith sustains you,” I say.

“I am a Muslim, but I also learned about Christianity when I was at school,” she continues, telling me she loves to read and that her favorite novel is *Silas Marner*, by George Eliot, the story of an outsider forced to flee his community after being falsely accused of a crime.

Operated by the Corrections Corporation of America, the EDC can hold as many as 360 people. Each dormitory has up to 44 single beds. The detainees eat, sleep, shower and



his kindly face as he describes the ordeal. I keep listening. His pain is evident.

“How are things going for you here?” I ask.

Suddenly, through the glass I see the tears stream down across his cheeks. I want to hug him through the barrier.

“No, no,” he started to say. “It’s ... I spoke with my family this morning and they asked me how I was. I told them not to worry, that everything was fine, but everything is not fine. It’s my diabetes. My feet are burning and my eyes, my vision is bad. They give me pills. They won’t give me my insulin.” I tell him I will pass on his message to others who may be able to help.

PEACEMAKER

A West Indian man with a broad smile tells me he has been working hard for 20 years to live the American dream. He found a niche cleaning cars and works with grit and integrity. His friends pooled their funds to hire a lawyer, but the lawyer does not visit him. He does not know the lawyer’s name.

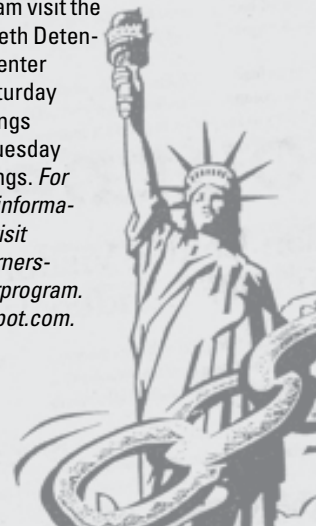
I ask how he spends his days. He is a peacemaker, of sorts. There are so many troubled souls

inside. Some take the cramped living conditions badly. He tells me he reaches out to the ones in pain. He tries to intervene to soothe the anger, to help make the living easier. You have found a calling here, a purpose, I say. Then, I have to leave. My heart seems to swell as our hands touch the glass to say goodbye.

Of my three friends, the first is now a student at a New York City community college, and the second has returned to his family and business. The third has been deported to his country of origin. These are our friends, neighbors and coworkers who are being deprived of their most basic freedoms for no good reason. We don’t need to make this system of mass incarceration of immigrants kinder and gentler, as the Obama administration proposes to do. We need to end it. The first step is to acknowledge the common humanity we share with the people stuck on the other side of the Plexiglas. They are ready to share their stories, if only we will listen.

SOJOURNERS

Diana Stewart is a member of the Sojourners Immigration Detention Center Visitor Project, a program of Manhattan’s Riverside Church. Sojourner draws people from all walks of life who refuse to ignore the plight of detained immigrants. Participants in the Sojourners program visit the Elizabeth Detention Center on Saturday mornings and Tuesday evenings. For more information, visit sojourners-visitorprogram.blogspot.com.



IMMIGRANT DETENTION FACT BOX

Immigrants Detained & Deported
2006: 185,431
2009: 440,000

ICE Budget for Detention & Deportation
2006: \$1,645,370 billion
2009: \$2,481,213 billion

Net Profit of Corrections Corporation of America
2005: \$50,122,000
2008: \$154,954,000

Sources: ICE, CCA

May Day Marches Multiply

BY KAREN YI

With Wall Street profits once again soaring while unemployment hovers around 10 percent, two different coalitions of labor unionists and immigrant rights groups will take to the streets of New York on May Day.

The May 1st Coalition for Worker and Immigrant Rights will rally at Union Square at noon on May 1 and march down Broadway to Wall Street. The event will feature cultural performances organized by the radical hip-hop group Rebel Diaz. A number of organizations will set up educational tables around Union Square.

Meanwhile, a couple of miles away, the Alliance for Labor and Immigrant Rights and Jobs for All will rally at Foley Square at 11 a.m. and then march around City Hall before returning to Foley Square. The Alliance is composed of more than two dozen labor union locals and several prominent immigrant rights groups. High unemployment and severe budget cuts have galvanized many of the city’s unions to take action.

“It was time [the unions] get back in the public eye,” said Kevin Pat Lynch, director of organizing and legislative affairs at RWDSU/UFCW Local 338.

The two coalitions share similar demands around immigrant rights, jobs and defending public services but tend to approach politics differently. The groups rallying at Foley Square often work with Democratic Party allies to try and advance their goals. The May 1st Coalition, which is closely aligned with the Workers World Party, emphasizes building popular movements that operate outside the two-party system. Both coalitions hope to draw thousands but have not agreed to unite their events.

“We’ve met with them and we will continue to meet,” said Charles Jenkins of the May 1st Coalition and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. “I can tell you the message is the same. There is an attack on workers all around the country.”

“It’s not a split,” said Lynch. “Anyone that’s marching with them is also marching with us also.”

May 1 is celebrated as International Workers Day in most of the world but not the United States.



WALKS THE WALK

BY JAISAL NOOR

Marisol Ramos is tired of her friends and family living in fear of deportation. The 25-year-old South Bronx native is walking 250 miles to lobby for a moratorium on deportations of undocumented families as well as the passage of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. The legislation would establish a path to citizenship for undocumented youth. Four Miami youth led a similar walk from Miami to Washington, D.C., dubbed the “Trail of Dreams.”

Ramos will be joined by three other members of the New York State Youth Leadership Council — Mexican immigrants Jose Luis Zacatelco, 29, and Gabriel Martinez, 27, who are both undocumented; and Martin Lopez, 22, who was born in California. They plan to arrive in Washington, D.C. on May 1, in time for the massive May Day immigrants rights rally planned for that day by a coalition of immigrants rights groups — including the National Immigration Forum and the Reform Immigration for America — who are calling for Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

“I’ve been working on [lobbying for] the DREAM Act for the last five years,” Ramos said. “Every year it has failed, I have seen the emotional toll on friends, and family members. Our lives are on hold, until we are all citizens... we had to do something drastic.”



At left:

IT’S PERSONAL: Though Marisol is a U.S. citizen, several of her relatives and close friends are undocumented. After learning about the DREAM Act five years ago, she helped found the New York Youth Leadership Council (NYYLC), a youth-driven grassroots group that organizes young people to lobby for immigration reform.

PHOTOS: Amelia H. Krales



At right:

PACKING FOR JUSTICE: Marisol Ramos packs the belongings she will carry with her on the three week walk from New York City to Washington, D.C. She says she packed enough for seven days, including shirts, pants, waterproof clothing, insect repellents and a sturdy pair of sneakers. “We were told to pack light because we would be moving around, but I didn’t listen,” she said.

Below:

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS TO WASHINGTON, D.C. On April 10, Ramos (center) began her walk across the George Washington Bridge, the first 4,800 feet in a 250-mile walk to the nation’s capital. José Luis Zacatelco, 29 (left), is another member of NYYLC who will be participating in the walk. “It was a very chilly and windy day, but over 100 people from different groups and local high schools came out,” Ramos said.



For complete slideshow,
see independent.org



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ARTISTS & BRECHT FORUM FAN PAGES ON FACEBOOK



GETTING BACK ON TRACK: Linda Harrison is one of 500 station agents facing layoffs on May 7. PHOTO: THOMAS MARCZEWSKI

Sabrina Greenwood started work as a station agent with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) five years ago with the hope of one day working her way up to the position of station supervisor.

But when she recently received a letter from the MTA that said that she, along with 500 other station agents who belong to Local 100 of the Transport Workers Union, would be laid off on May 7, Greenwood had to put her plans on hold.

"It's frustrating, I have kids to feed. You're not just laying me off, you're laying off my four children, too," said Greenwood, who lives near Co-op City in the Bronx.

While Greenwood, 38, may be reclassified to a different MTA job, she is worried that

New York City and throughout the country.

For Linda Harrison, another station agent who will be laid off from her current position on May 7, worker cutbacks also mean a decrease in safety for commuters.

Harrison, who often works the night shift, says that having agents in subway station booths deters crime, and also allows employees to look out for customer safety. In addition to selling subway cards and providing tourists with directions, Harrison acts as the eyes and ears of the MTA, watching out for sick and elderly commuters, reuniting lost children with their parents and stopping trains when customers fall on the tracks.

"The MTA always says, 'If you see something, say something.' If we're not there, who are you saying it to?" Greenwood said.

Of the more than \$1 billion in funding that the MTA has received in federal stimulus funds, only 10 percent can be used for operational expenses — which includes paying salaries — while the rest of the monies must be earmarked for capital projects, such as Second Avenue subway line and the Fulton Transit Center.

With more than 70,000 MTA employees throughout the city, 35,000 of whom belong to TWU's Local 100, many transportation advocates, including Patafio, think that MTA Chief Jay Walder should rethink his refusal to allocate available stimulus funds for operational expenses.

Patafio views Walder's resistance as an attempt to injure unions and bolster the right-wing view that unions are to blame for the MTA's budget deficit.

But with the interstate highway system already receiving 82 percent of federal transportation funding, pressuring politicians to increase spending for public transportation at the national level will not be easy.

The Keep America Moving coalition is looking to two upcoming actions to mobilize supporters and boost public engagement in the cause for affordable transportation.

On April 26 and 27, union members, community advocates and environmentalists will participate in rallies and lobby politicians in Washington, D.C., for increased federal funding for public transportation.

Greenwood, who plans to be joined by her four children, coworkers and neighbors, is looking forward to traveling to Washington,

D.C., to take part in the weekend's events.

A rally at Penn Station on May 4 to stop transit cuts is also in the works. In addition to the 500 station agent jobs that will be cut in May, an additional 500 bus drivers will be laid off starting in June. According to Patafio, the May 4 action is emblematic of the kind of movement the coalition is working to create.

"People have to stand up, rise up and be counted. We need to stand up and say we're not going to take it," Patafio said.

Harrison, who will turn 50 later this month, has postponed her birthday plans to focus on working with TWU to speak out about the job cuts.

"We're going to fight it until the end. Like they say, it's not over until the fat lady sings," Harrison said.

TRANSIT FIGHT

BY ELIZABETH HENDERSON

in the current economy her chance of finding work that matches her current salary of \$50,000 a year is slim.

With the MTA facing a budget shortfall of \$800 million — which has already led to fare hikes, service cutbacks and layoffs — TWU is leading the charge to stand up for green jobs and affordable transportation.

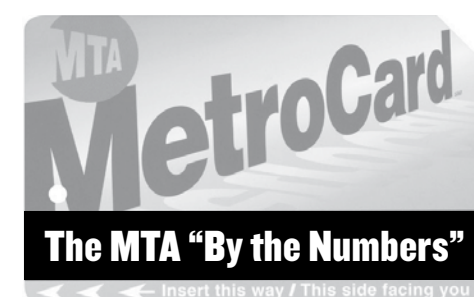
The Transport Workers Union has formed Keep America Moving, a national coalition of transportation industry workers, environmentalists, advocates and political leaders that are working together to save affordable mass transit by mobilizing transit workers and riders alike.

Coalition members include the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the Rainbow Push Coalition and Sierra Club NYC.

Funding is an essential part of the coalition's short-term goals, especially as the MTA faces extreme budget deficits.

"Mass transit is a public service. And in this recession, the public sector has become the sacrificial lamb," said J.P. Patafio, the national director of Keep America Moving.

Patafio, along with other coalition members, is calling for an increase in federal funding for public transportation, both in



Number of MTA employees: **70,000**

Number of unionized and non-unionized employees facing layoffs: **1,000**

Number of station agents (who are members of TWU) facing layoffs: **500**

Number of TWU Local 100 members: **35,000**

Average annual salary for an MTA employee: **\$56,000**

Amount of money being spent on the Second Avenue subway line: **\$17 billion**

Current projected cost of the 7 train extension: **Over \$2.1 billion**

—JON GERBERG

OBAMACARE

NOW THAT CONGRESS HAS ACTED, THE STRUGGLE FOR UNIVERSAL, AFFORDABLE, HIGH-QUALITY HEALTHCARE CAN FINALLY BEGIN.

BY ERIC LAURSEN

It was high drama on Capitol Hill in March, the culmination of a year-long, tooth-and-nail fight between Democrats and Republicans about overhauling national healthcare. When the battle was over, President Barack Obama signed a historic bill aimed at expanding health insurance coverage and reforming an expensive, inefficient healthcare system that leaves 46 million Americans without coverage and the middle class in debt to its eyeballs to pay for it. For the first time, healthcare in America will approach the status of a right, rather than something one has to “earn.”

But one wonders, sometimes, what the fuss was about. For all the apocalyptic rhetoric from Republican opponents, the new structure is a “state-based, incremental, industry-friendly reform that builds on our current system,” said Micah Weinberg, senior research fellow with the New American

Foundation.

Nor is this the end of the fight. It’s more like the beginning. As with Social Security in its early years, it will be a long time — a decade, if not more — before we know the exact structure of the new system. Regulators, including agencies in all 50 states, will be busy making many thousands of rules and figuring out how to enforce them. Congress will no doubt have to pass several more modest bills to resolve regulatory issues. Expect more efforts to mold the emerging universal healthcare system in a conservative, pro-business direction.

WHAT DOES IT DO, EXACTLY?

The Patient Protection Act is a huge bill, its provisions touching nearly every aspect of healthcare. The most conspicuous parts of it are pretty simple, however (see sidebar).

The new law expands coverage by requiring nearly every American to purchase

health insurance. It does this through direct subsidies and by expanding Medicaid to cover more people at higher income levels. A combination of incentives and penalties are supposed to encourage employers to keep providing coverage for their workers. Meanwhile, health insurance exchanges will be set up in each state in the hope that they can make a basic insurance package available at lower rates to lower-income households.

Obamacare comes with a \$965 billion price tag over its first 10 years. That may seem like a lot, but it’s much cheaper than preserving the Bush tax cuts for upper-income earners.

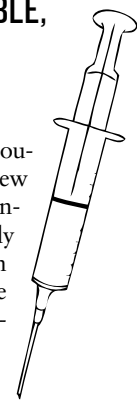
The new system pays for itself in part by charging penalties to people and employers who don’t purchase insurance. It also sets stricter standards for Medicare Advantage, the private-insurer alternative to Medicare, and phases out the subsidies Washington pays to providers under that program.

But higher taxes are where the big money is.

High-income individuals and couples will be slapped with a new tax on all earnings, including investment income. That partially reverses decades of Republican tax policy that walled off more and more of big investors’ dividends and capital-gains earnings. New excise taxes will fall on pharmaceutical companies, medical device manufacturers, and health insurers, as well as on high-cost insurance plans.

Together, the Congressional Budget Office projects, the new levies will raise \$1.1 trillion over 10 years, more than enough to pay for the expanded coverage. In fact, the administration claims the new revenue structure will reduce the federal deficit by \$1.2 trillion in its second decade.

Continued on page 19



WHAT'S GOOD

Better, more dependable coverage for more people:

- Medicaid eligibility expands to cover millions of people with income up to 133 percent of the poverty line, including those without dependents.
- Gradually closes remaining gaps in Medicare prescription-drug coverage.
- Insurers prohibited from a slew of bad practices, including discriminating against or charging higher rates for individuals with pre-existing conditions, charging copays or deductibles for preventive care and medical screenings and dropping policy holders when they are sick.
- Funding for the new system comes largely from the haves, not the have-nots: a new 3.8 percent payroll tax on the income of individuals making at least \$200,000 a year and couples making \$250,000 and new excise taxes on pharmaceutical companies, medical device manufacturers and health insurers.
- States that want to do so can experiment with offering a universal, single-payer health insurance alternative, starting Jan. 1, 2017.

WHAT'S BAD

Private insurers still in the driver's seat:

- New system will still rely entirely on private insurers, instead of forcing them to compete with a nationwide public option.
- No direct control of insurers' premiums.
- New “health insurance exchanges” will be run at the state level, where regulatory skill and funding are often low and one or two big providers can easily dominate.
- Individuals and employers are required to purchase coverage, but subsidies may be too small to make coverage affordable for individuals, while penalties are too low to compel employers to comply.
- Future funding will come partly from an excise tax on “Cadillac” health-insurance plans, many of them covering unionized workers.



MON APRIL 26, 7PM • \$5 Sugg

DISCUSSION: IMMIGRANTS & PRISON JUSTICE.

Activists, authors and former political prisoners will discuss the intersections of immigrant detention, the war on terror, and state repression.

FRI APRIL 30, 7PM • Free

READING: O FALLEN ANGEL.

Join author Kate Zambreno for a reading from her debut novel, *O Fallen Angel*, an American triptych and grotesque homage to *Mrs. Dalloway*.

TUES MAY 4, 7PM • Free

READING: OFFICE OF BLAME ACCOUNTABILITY set up impromptu “headquarters” in areas where there is a high frequency of collective blame — Ground Zero, national political conventions and Wall Street. Sitting unassumingly at a desk with a typewriter and red phone, Blame Accountants invited passersby to blame, record and reflect.

SUN MAY 9, 7PM • Free

READING: OUR MOTHERS, OURSELVES. In *Harmattan Rain and Powder Necklace*, Ghanaian authors Ayesha Harruna Attah and Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond take the reader on a trip across continents to find themselves, independent of their mothers.

TUES MAY 11, 7PM • \$5 Sugg

WORKSHOP: MAKE STREETS SAFER. Join Transportation Alternatives to help craft the Lower East Side Action Plan to make streets safer for bicyclists and pedestrians.

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TUES MAY 11 • 7:30PM, SLIDING SCALE: \$6/\$10/\$15

BOOK PARTY: WHO CAN STOP THE DRUMS? Author Sujatha Fernandes explores the barrios of Caracas in her book, *Who Can Stop the Drums?*

SAT MAY 22 • 9AM – 5PM, SLIDING SCALE: \$65-\$85 PER DAY

2-DAY WORKSHOP BEGINS: EDUCATION FOR LIBERATION. Developed by two Brazilian Marxist educators and political cultural activists: Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal.

MON MAY 24 • 10AM – 6PM Early Registration (until May 8): \$ 325.00


3-DAY WORKSHOP BEGINS: THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED. Exercises, games and improvised scene work from the Theater of the Oppressed repertory, developed by Augusto Boal. Co-sponsor: Theater of the Oppressed Laboratory.

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Bolivians Mark Victory in Water War

BY RENÉE FELTZ

What would you do if your water bill shot up 200 percent to what amounted to a third of your income? When this happened to residents of Cochabamba, Bolivia, they started a revolt. This April marks the tenth anniversary of Bolivia's "Water War."

For much of the 1990s, Bolivia fell into a trap of taking loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund that required the privatization of key industries. As a result, the country's electricity and telecommunications services, as well as mining operations, had all come under the ownership of multinational corporations.

In September 1999, Bolivia's president signed a contract with Aguas del Tunari to privatize water services in Cochabamba, the nation's third largest city. The corporation was owned by U.S.-based Bechtel Corp., along with Italy's Edison and Spain's Abengoa.

As the contract kicked in, water rates went through the roof, and Aguas del Tunari even acquired the right to charge for the use of wells dug by impoverished residents who lacked piped water. For native residents, Aymaras, Quechuas and Guaraní, the contract cut off their access to the blood of "Pachamama," or Mother Earth.

Outraged middle-class homeowners joined the poor and indigenous to form a Coalition in Defense of Water and Life that fought to cancel the contract. They held a demonstration that took over Cochabamba's central plaza. Protesters stayed there for four days even as police shot into the unarmed crowd, killing one man and injuring others.

After the protests, Aguas del Tunari's contract was canceled and the company left Bolivia. It then sought \$50 million in compensation from a World Bank court that operated behind closed doors. But in 2006, after worldwide demand that it drop the case, the company settled for a token payment of two bolivianos (about 30 cents).

Now water services in Cochabamba are once again supplied by the municipal water and sanitation company, SEMAPA, but the struggle for access continues. Studies show as much as two thirds of the city still lacks piped water because new infrastructure has



DRINK THIS: A Bolivian woman confronts police during the April 2000 water revolt in Cochabamba. PHOTO: TOM KRUSE

been stalled by lack of funds. Many residents question the water quality and prefer to buy bottled water to drink. The problems are due in part to the patronage and graft that has long been a problem for SEMAPA.

Frustrated with systemic corruption, residents in the southern districts of Cochabamba developed their own system of water distribution. The Democracy Center, a U.S. nonprofit that works in Bolivia, profiled several cooperatives that use elevated tanks and wells provide water for cooking and bathing via a neighborhood water system. One cop president told researchers with the group

that he would prefer to remain independent from SEMAPA so policies and prices would continue to be decided upon communally.

Despite the problems, SEMAPA is slowly expanding water service to new areas of the city. This is what sets it apart from transnational water companies that maximize their profits by charging higher fees for already existing customers, but generally fail to invest in new infrastructure — the most expensive part of their business. In this way, Bolivia's "water war" was seen as a decisive victory in the battle against the commodification of water.

world briefs

MASSACRE CHARGES DROPPED

Human rights advocates are outraged that the Philippine government has dropped charges against two members of a powerful clan accused of planning a November 2009 massacre in which 57 people were killed. Officials claim the two men were not present during the attack. Members of the prosecution panel protested the decision, saying physical presence is not required for a conspiracy indictment. Victims' relatives accused outgoing President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of clearing the men because they are longtime political allies and could deliver votes for her party in the May election. Human Rights Watch called on presidential candidates to make ending impunity for politically motivated killings central to their platforms.



ERUPTION IN KYRGYZSTAN

After spending a winter suffering from energy blackouts — followed by a 400 percent rise in heating costs — frustrated protesters in Kyrgyzstan attacked government offices April 7. Within a week, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev resigned and the new administration abolished the rate increases. News of the pending uprising was repressed when several independent TV, print and online media outlets were raided for insulting Bakiyev and for using pirated software. TV workers said police in one raid were joined by a man representing Microsoft, who previously worked for the company. The U.S. has supported Bakiyev despite his record of corruption and human rights abuses. It recently tripled the fees it pays to lease space in the former Soviet republic for a military base key to ferrying troops and supplies to Afghanistan.

PERMA-FOOD

Would you believe a report that McDonald's had to halt its food composting plan — the largest in the world — after scientists confirmed its food would not break down for a thousand years? Many people fell for this story on the eco-news website, grist.org, which later admitted the post was an April Fool's joke. But the report was based on a real experiment by Joann Bruso, host of babybites.info, who bought a Happy Meal and placed it on her shelf for one year. After 12 months, she said the burger and fries had no mold, odor or decomposition — and she had photos to prove it. McDonald's tried to dismiss Bruso's claim as an "urban legend," and still plans to put green composting bins in its 31,000 restaurants around the world to collect 1.5 billion tons of food waste.

LEGAL LAND GRABS?

Many transnational companies that lease land to grow food for export in countries like Kenya often agree to projects that benefit local communities. But the terms are agreed to behind closed doors and "environmental costs are usually overlooked: the loss of water, species diversity and ecosystems that are essential for food security," Jonathan Davies of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature told the Inter Press Service. He said many investment treaties prohibit "performance requirements" that preserve the environment or limit exports. "It is therefore essential that any government contemplating entering into a major agricultural deal do a careful assessment of the legal implications," said Mark Halle, director of the International Institute for Sustainable Development.

CLIMATE SUMMIT FOCUSES ON HUMAN NEED, NOT CORPORATE GREED

BY RENÉE FELTZ

The pledges made at the failed U.N. Climate Summit in Copenhagen in December would allow global temperatures to rise as much as 5 percent, turning Africa into an arid wasteland and drowning many islands.

So it's no wonder that developing nations that face the worst effects of increasing world temperatures were dissatisfied with the summit. Among those most upset was Bolivian President Evo Morales, who told reporters, "We have an obligation to save [all of] humanity, not just half of humanity."

Morales has invited the world to an alternative "People's Summit on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth" that he will host in a village called Tiquipaya, outside of Cochabamba.

As *The Independent* went to press, more than 10,000 people were expected to gather for the summit April 19-22, joined by heads of state from many of the countries that felt left out of the U.N. talks.

"The only way to get negotiations back on track, not just for Bolivia or

other countries, but for all of life, biodiversity, our Mother Earth is to put civil society back into the process," said Pablo Solón Romero, Bolivia's ambassador to the U.N.

Concern about climate change is already widespread in Bolivia, which has seen the water supply for its capital, La Paz, decrease by at least 40 percent from the melting of the Tuni Condoriri glacier.

On the summit's agenda is a proposal to create a climate justice tribunal that could enforce emissions commitments and keep global warming down, ideally to one degree celsius. Another agenda item is the wording for a "Universal Declaration of Mother Earth Rights" that would be the equivalent of the U.N.'s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Working groups will tackle issues like "climate debt" with writer Eduardo Galeano and "climate migrants" with author Naomi Klein. The group "Do we need a referendum on climate change?" will include *Democracy Now!* host Amy Goodman.

Bolivia's ambassador to Swit-



Bolivians arrive for the climate summit. PHOTO: KARAH WOODWARD

zerland, Angelica Navarro, told reporter Joseph Huff-Hanon that the summit will differ from what happened in Copenhagen, but "by no means is the Cochabamba meeting replacing the U.N. system. It's an effort at dialogue, at opening up to each other."

Already, progress is being made. At a U.N. climate discussion in Bonn, Germany held just days before the People's Summit, Bolivian representatives got the negotiating teams to delay a deadline for pro-

posals to the next major U.N. climate summit, in Cancún, Mexico, in late November.

This means that plans made in Cochabamba could be included in the follow-up to Copenhagen, perhaps yielding a more inclusive, and maybe more successful, outcome. "The central aim of any climate summit is not to save itself and accept any outcome," observed Solón, "but to come to an agreement that will save humanity."

Visit *The Independent's* blog at independent.org for on-the-ground reports and photos from the People's Summit. In our next issue, we'll feature a full reportback, along with articles on indigenous-led climate justice movements in Bolivia and the nation's progress in developing a socialist agenda.

RECLAIMING EARTH DAY

With Climate Chaos on the Horizon, the Environmental Movement

BY BRIAN TOKAR

On the 40th anniversary of Earth Day April 22, many seasoned environmentalists are left wondering how, in recent decades, so little has actually been accomplished.

While environmental awareness has seeped into mainstream U.S. society since the 1970s — the era when 20 million people hit the streets on Earth Day to demand action — the structures of power remain largely the same. The mass mobilizations around the original Earth Day helped spur then-President Richard Nixon to sign a series of ambitious environmental laws that helped to clean contaminated waterways, saved the bald eagle from the ravages of pesticides and began to clear the air, which in the early 1960s was so polluted that people were passing out in cities across the country. Most environmental victories since then have benefited from those changes in the law, but more fundamental changes seem as distant as ever.

Today's environmental movement is floundering, even though the stakes are even higher. While local grassroots environmental campaigns continue, the best-known national organizations can point to few recent victories. And they have failed to demonstrate meaningful leadership around what climatologist James Hansen calls the "predominant moral issue of this century": the struggle to prevent the catastrophic and irreversible warming of the planet.

As British journalist Johann Hari reported in *The Nation* in his "The Wrong Kind of Green" in March, this is partly the result of a legacy of corporate-styled environmental organizations teaming up with the world's most polluting companies.

In response to the climate crisis, we have seen unprecedented collaboration between large environmental organizations and corporations seeking to profit from new environmental legislation. For example,

the Climate Action Partnership (known as USCAP) has brought Alcoa, DuPont, General Electric and General Motors together with the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Environmental Defense Fund and the Nature Conservancy to push for the "market-based" approach to climate legislation known as "cap-and-trade." This policy would put a cap on the total amount of pollution, then allow businesses limiting their carbon dioxide emissions to sell "permits to pollute" to dirtier companies. This would create a vast, highly speculative market in carbon credits and offsets, with gigantic perks for corporations and little benefit for the planet.

It begs the question — where has the environmental movement gone wrong?

THE FIRST EARTH DAY

It turns out that the original Earth Day on April 22, 1970, was initially a staged event. Politicians like Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-WI) and Rep. Pete McCloskey (R-CA) took the lead in crafting the first Earth Day celebration that unexpectedly brought millions of people out around the country. The events, however, were supported by establishment institutions like the Conservation Foundation, a corporate think tank founded by Laurence Rockefeller in 1948. Nixon even began the year with a proclamation saying that the 1970s would be the "environmental decade."

Anti-Vietnam War activists argued that Earth Day (originally the Environmental Teach-In) became a devious attempt to divert national attention away from the war and from efforts to raise awareness of the common causes of war, poverty and environmental destruction. An editorial in *Ramparts*, the most prominent activist journal of the period, described Earth Day as, "the first step in a con game that will do little more than abuse the environment even further."

The April 1970 *Ramparts* featured a striking exposé on "The Eco-Establishment," which focused on the corporate think tanks that were helping to shape the emerging en-

vironmental legislation. "[T]oday's big business conservation," *Ramparts* editorialized, "is not interested in preserving the earth; it is rationally reorganizing for a more efficient rape of resources."

Journalist I.F. Stone wrote in his famous investigative weekly, "[J]ust as the Caesars once used bread and circuses, so ours were at last learning to use rock-and-roll idealism and non-inflammatory social issues to turn the youth off from more urgent concerns which might really threaten the power structure."

To everyone's surprise, Earth Day turned out to be the largest outpouring of public sentiment on any political issue to date. It drew public attention to environmentalism as a social movement in its own right. And it set the stage to pressure Congress to pass 15 major national environmental laws over a 10-year period and establish the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

A RUSH OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS

The origin of those 1970s environmental laws also has an underappreciated back story. Throughout the 1960s, people were responding with horror to the increasingly visible effects of smog, oil spills, pesticide contamination and other environmental assaults. Local governments responded by implementing their own, sometimes far-reaching programs of environmental monitoring and enforcement. Creative environmental lawsuits established important and unanticipated precedents.

This proved costly for business, and corporate interests came to view federal intervention as a possible solution. "[T]he elite of business leadership," reported *Fortune* magazine on the eve of Earth Day in 1970, "strongly desire the federal government to step in, set the standards, regulate all activities pertaining to the environment, and help finance the job with tax incentives."

Far from an interference with business prerogatives, environmental regulation by the federal government became a way to allay public concerns while offering corporate

America a menu of uniform and predictable environmental rules. The new federal rules often preempted states and localities from enforcing regulations more stringent than those advanced at the national level.

Just a decade later, President Ronald Reagan packed the new regulatory agencies' staffs with corporate hacks who were openly hostile to their agencies' missions. (President George W. Bush replicated this strategy in the early 2000s.) Reagan's first EPA administrator resigned after two years in office, facing charges of contempt of Congress after replacing the agency's senior staff with officials from companies like General Motors and Exxon and mercilessly slashing the budget. Reagan's cartoonish Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, "introduced policies aimed at transferring control of public lands and resources to private entrepreneurs at a rate that had not been seen since the great giveaways of the 19th century," according to former *New York Times* reporter Philip Shabecoff.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS QUO

Meanwhile, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, representatives of the largest national environmental groups became an increasingly visible and entrenched part of the Washington political scene. As the appearance of success within the system grew, organizations from the National Wildlife Federation to the Natural Resources Defense Council restructured and changed personnel so as to more effectively play the insider game. Large environmental groups worked to sustain the smooth functioning of the system, rather than challenge it. The Sierra Club grew from 80,000 to 630,000 members during the 1980s, and the conservative National Wildlife Federation reported membership gains of up to 8,000 a month, totaling nearly a million. The total budget of the 10 largest environmental groups grew from less than \$10 million in 1965 to \$218 million in 1985 and \$514 million in 1990. Those advocating a more corporate-style or-

HARD TO BREATHE: Smog over New York. PHOTO: DR. EDWIN P. EWING, JR.

the Union Square rally and later signed legislation creating the state Department of Environmental Conservation. At the time, the fair was the largest demonstration in Union Square since the socialist rallies of the 1930s.

Hot environmental issues at the time included addressing air pollution, municipal waste, noise pollution and the contamination of the Hudson and East Rivers. *The New York Times* reported that people also advocated other issues, from civil rights to ending the Vietnam War. At one end of the 14th Street fair, the singer Odetta sang, "We Shall Overcome," while at the other end a rock group yelled "Power to the People!"

In an effort to address urban traffic, Mayor Lindsay promised \$1 billion dollars over 10 years to develop 12 additional subway tunnels and improve public transportation and said the city would be "discouraging automobile use in the central business areas, particularly."

Severe smog inversions took place in the city in 1948, 1963 and 1966, when 168 people died. People developed asthma and other respiratory diseases at alarming rates. In addition to car exhaust

and burning heating oil, incinerating garbage was the largest contributor to air pollution in the city. In the 1960s, one-third of the city's garbage was burned in some 17,000 apartment building incinerators and 22 municipal incinerators in which emissions were not regulated.

The Hudson River was extremely contaminated, as garbage and industrial waste had been dumped directly into it since the Industrial Revolution. In the 1960s, swimming was banned in parts of the river. From 1947 to 1977, General Electric discharged up to 1.3 million pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into the river at its Hudson Falls and Fort Edward facilities.

In a speech at the D.C. festival, Earth Day national organizer Denis Hayes, 25, made it clear that Earth Day 1970 was just the beginning.

"We are building a movement, a movement with a broad base, a movement which transcends traditional political boundaries," Hayes said. "It is a movement that values people more than technology, people more than political boundaries, people more than profit."

—JESSICA LEE



New York City threw a large street party April 22, 1970, as part of the first ever national Earth Day teach-in and celebration.

It was estimated that some 100,000 people joined the Earth Day festivities in Manhattan. In an unprecedented move, then-Mayor John V.

Lindsay closed Fifth Avenue to traffic from Union Square Park to Central Park for two hours, essentially leaving Midtown traffic in gridlock. An "ecological carnival" took place on 14th Street between Third and Seventh Avenues. New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller rode a bicycle to

Needs Traction

ganizational model invariably won internal battles within the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth and even Greenpeace. They increasingly avoided issues and tactics that might prove alienating to wealthy donors. By the early 1990s, even the thoroughly mainstream former editor of *Audubon* magazine would lament that “naturalists have been replaced by ecocrats who are more comfortable on Capitol Hill than in the woods, fields, meadows, mountains and swamps.”

Environmental groups also began their flirtation with corporate sponsorships, so aptly summarized by Hari in *The Nation*. In the lead-up to the 20th anniversary of Earth Day in 1990, activists (including this author) revealed ties between groups such as the National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society, and a rogue's gallery of major oil, chemical, utility and banking corporations.

THE RISE OF GREEN CONSUMERISM

By 1990, everyone seemed to want to be an environmentalist. President George H. W. Bush proclaimed himself a defender of the environment and briefly aimed to distance himself from the anti-environmental excesses of the Reagan years by adopting the first national cap-and-trade system to address the problem of acid rain. Sen. Al Gore (D-TN), the 1988 presidential primary campaign's leading Democratic war hawk, began speaking out about global warming and other environmental threats. Britain's reactionary Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher called herself a “green.” Even the president of the World Bank won praise from environmental publications for voicing concerns about the bank's role in environmental destruction. The Environmental Defense Fund led the way in pushing for a more aggressively “market-oriented” approach to environmental policy.

So, it was not a huge surprise when the celebrations of the 20th anniversary of Earth Day in 1990 became the coming-out party for a more overtly corporate brand of environmentalism. Earth Day celebrations became a virtual extravaganza of corporate hype, and “green consumerism” was the order of the day. The official overriding message was simply “change your lifestyle,” by recycling, driving less and buying green products. And while the national Earth Day organization turned down some \$4 million in corporate donations that did not meet its rather “flexible” criteria, celebrations in several major U.S. cities were supported by notorious polluters such as Monsanto, Peabody Coal and Georgia Power. Corporations “greenwashed” their image, from the nuclear-power industry to the Chemical Manufacturers' Association, by purchasing full-page advertisements proclaiming that, for them, “Every day is Earth Day.”

Some activists responded by organizing local Earth Day anniversaries of their own, focusing on local environmental struggles, urban issues, the nature of corporate power and a host of other problems that were systematically excluded from most official Earth Day events. Left Greens and Youth Greens in the Northeast initiated a call to shut down Wall Street the Monday following Earth Day and were joined by environmental justice activists, radical Earth First! organizers, ecofeminists, New York City squatters and many others. In the

early morning of April 23, just after millions had participated in polite, feel-good Earth Day commemorations all across the country, hundreds converged on the New York Stock Exchange with the goal of obstructing the opening of trading on that day. Journalist Juan González, in his *Daily News* column, decried the weekend's “embalming and fire sale of Earth Day,” and told his 1.2 million readers, “Certainly, those who sought to co-opt Earth Day into a media and marketing extravaganza, to make the public feel good while obscuring the corporate root of the Earth's pollution, almost succeeded.”

The 1990 Earth Day Wall Street Action reflected the flowering of grassroots environmental activity that had emerged throughout the 1980s, partly in response to the compromises of the big environmental groups. The popular response to toxic chemical pollution — launched by the mothers of sick children living near the severely polluted Love Canal in New York — grew into a nationwide environmental justice movement that exposed the disproportionate exposure of communities of color to toxic hazards. During the lead-up to Earth Day 1990, a hundred environmental justice activists signed a letter to the eight national environmental organizations criticizing the dearth of people of color on those groups' staffs and boards, along with their increasing reliance on corporate funding.

The Clinton-Gore administration of the 1990s perfected the art of channeling environmental rhetoric while simultaneously encouraging increased resource extraction — prefiguring Barack Obama's recent overtures to the nuclear, oil and coal industries. As the decade ended, environmental activists made a strong showing in Seattle, as a key part of the broader coalition of social justice, labor and green groups that successfully challenged the World Trade Organization in 1999. While many of the grassroots initiatives of the 1980s and 1990s continued through the early 2000s, (see Douglas Bevington's new book, *The Rebirth of Environmentalism*), others felt dismayed by the ineffectiveness of large environmental groups. This led to the continued evolution of Earth First! and other radical environmental groups that focused on direct-action tactics, rather than lobbying and policymaking.

CLIMATE ACTIVISTS TURN UP THE HEAT

Over the last few years, it appeared that the climate crisis might be ushering in a renewed wave of grassroots environmental action in the United States. A 2009 student environmental conference attracted some 3,000 participants to Washington, D.C., and the event was followed by a symbolic blockade of the city's large coal-fired power plant. On the tenth anniversary of World



GINO BARIZZA

Trade Organization protests in Seattle on November 30, 2009, climate justice actions across the United States included the lock-down of an intersection outside the Chicago Climate Exchange (home of the corporate-driven “voluntary” carbon market), a blockade of a major component for a new coal-fired power plant in South Carolina, protests of large banks that finance the coal industry and other mega-polluters and a rally outside the Natural Resources Defense Council's offices to protest their aggressive advocacy for carbon markets. People in West Virginia and across southern Appalachia have stepped up resistance to the ravages of mountaintop-removal coal mining, while others across the country — from Vermont to the Navajo Nation — have redoubled their efforts against Obama's planned expansion of the nuclear industry.

Most of 2009's climate actions, however, were aimed at trying to influence U.N. member countries to reach a comprehensive agreement at the December U.N. climate conference in Copenhagen. The failure of diplomacy in Copenhagen deflated the energy of many activists, and the post-Copenhagen resurgence of climate actions has yet to materialize. Meanwhile, although Earth Day has become an annual ritual in some communities, as well as on many college campuses, the upcoming 40th anniversary has brought a notable scarcity of attention.

One event this year highlights just how quickly corporate environmentalism has evolved from tragedy to farce. On the eve of Earth Day on April 21, participants in a “Creating Climate Wealth Summit” will attend a glitzy gala event hosted by the Carbon War Room, an exclusive alliance of elite environmentalists and financiers headed by the notorious multibillionaire Richard Branson of the Virgin Group. Branson is most celebrated these days for his experimental biofueled airplanes, along with a venture to promote outer-space tourism and public advocacy for geoengineering the climate. For only \$450 (a third less for non-profits), participants can have dinner with

Branson, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, and founding Earth Day organizer Denis Hayes at the new Ronald Reagan International Trade Center, just around the corner from the White House.

Meanwhile, the green marketing of products is alive and well, from clothing to Priuses to luxury ecotourism. The U.K.'s *Guardian* reported from a “green business” conference in London last year that “as much as 70 percent of future advertising would have an environmental focus.”

Today, right-wing pundits depict environmentalism as an elite hobby that threatens jobs, while many progressive environmentalists cite the potential for “green jobs” to help reignite economic growth. Both views are sorely missing a central element of what has made environmentalism such a compelling counter-hegemonic worldview ever since the 1970s: The promise that reorienting societies toward a renewed harmony with nature can help spur a revolutionary transformation of our world.

This outlook has helped inspire anti-nuclear activists to sit in at power plant construction sites, forest activists to sustain long-term tree-sits, and environmental justice activists to stand firm in defense of their communities. People around the world are acting in solidarity with indigenous peoples fighting resource extraction on their lands. With climate chaos looming on the horizon, such a transformation is no longer optional. Our very survival now depends on our ability to renounce the status quo and create a more humane and ecologically balanced way of life.

Brian Tokar is the director of the Vermont-based Institute for Social Ecology (social-ecology.org) and a participant in the climate justice networks Climate SOS and the Mobilization for Climate Justice. He is the author of several books, including *Earth for Sale: Reclaiming Ecology in the Age of Corporate Greenwash* (South End Press, 1997). Read the longer version of this article at independent.org.

MELTDOWN GREEK STYLE

BY COSTAS PANAYOTAKIS

As a Greek teaching at the City University of New York, I can't help but notice the parallels between brutal budget cuts in Greece and the impact of the economic crisis in the United States.

Economic and political leaders around the world are bent on resolving the latest capitalist crisis by shifting the burden onto those least responsible for its eruption. One of the most recent examples is on display in Greece, where cutbacks amid an economic meltdown have met widespread resistance.

The full force of the current economic crisis hit Greece later than the United States. The country went through a temporary period of economic growth fueled by debt and a real-estate and construction boom partly linked to the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

But the story of Greece in the last generation or so remains one of permanent economic and social turmoil linked to a process of restructuring characterized by privatization, the spread of "flexible" and insecure forms of employment, growing economic inequality and chronically high levels of unemployment — especially among women and young workers.

As with other countries, the European Union was the vehicle for this neoliberal restructuring. Joining the exclusive "Euro zone" was supposed to mark Greece's ascendance into a developed capitalist economy. But inclusion requires restrictive policies aimed at keeping budget deficits and inflation low at the cost of high levels of unemployment.

The economic injustice and social disintegration these policies generated led to the explosive youth revolt that shook Greece in December 2008 and sent chills down the collective spine of economic and political elites in Europe and beyond. Interestingly, this revolt broke out even before Greece had felt the full force of the global capitalist crisis. But the bailout of Greek banks by the Greek government — some 28 billion euros (roughly \$38 billion) — fed people's rage at the incompetence and corruption of Greek economic and political elites.

Then in September 2009, Greece an-



SOLIDARITY: Protesters in Athens carry a banner that reads "Shut Downs — Sackings — Privatizations; We Respond with Occupations," and is signed by "Worker's Solidarity." PHOTO: FIL KALER, FILKALER.COM

nounced that its deficit would be four times the European Union's maximum 3 percent of national income. This has driven up the cost of interest rates on Greece's loans and debt.

Now that the full force of the crisis is being felt in Greece, the government is imposing further savage cutbacks. More than 600,000 public-sector workers have seen their wages sliced and pensions frozen. Unemployment has soared to 14.6 percent and is projected to rise to 20 percent. A recent survey in Greece found half of respondents said their salaries no longer cover their needs, and the Greek press has reported on suicides of business owners whose businesses fail and workers who have just lost their jobs.

Even more draconian measures could be imposed if Greece turns to the International Monetary Fund and the European Union for a loan of 45 billion euros (\$61 billion) to continue servicing its debt.

The "socialist" government that imposed these cuts won last fall's election by oppos-

ing the then-governing Conservative Party's plans to resolve the crisis by adapting "necessary" austerity measures. By arguing that these cuts would deepen the crisis and lead to the collapse of tax revenues, the socialists won the election by a 10-point margin, the largest in Greece's recent political history.

But now Greeks are facing what Americans faced a year earlier. They voted for candidates who claimed to represent change, only to get governments that serve large corporations and global financial interests rather than addressing the needs of ordinary citizens.

In a sense, the economic policies of the Greek government are worse than those of the Democrats. Although the Obama administration has announced budget freezes in the coming years, he did push for a stimulus package rather than for austerity measures. But many progressive economists have noted that the effectiveness of this package was diminished both by its small size and the concessions it made to the trickle-down

philosophy of lower taxes on the rich.

One of the effects of Obama's policies is a 10 percent official unemployment rate, much higher than what the Obama administration was predicting. His stimulus package failed to provide sufficient support to states that find themselves forced to balance budgets by cutting social services.

The economic crisis has also advanced the creeping privatization of public colleges and universities. This has been most obvious in California, which has imposed dramatic tuition hikes, triggering student and faculty strikes, building occupations and an inspiring resistance movement. But it has also been true in New York.

Governor David Paterson recently called for yet another round of cuts for CUNY and SUNY and proposed to make it easier for universities to raise tuition. If approved, these measures would continue to shift the cost of public higher education from the city and the state onto the students. Education is on its way to becoming just another commodity accessible only to those who can afford to buy it.

The situation faced in New York and throughout the United States may not be quite as dramatic as that in Greece, but the pattern is the same. Those most responsible for the global crisis have shifted the burden of the crisis to the rest of us — whether it be Greek workers facing lower incomes and higher prices, U.S. public college students paying higher tuition for an educational experience diminished by relentless budget cuts or ordinary Americans financing Wall Street bailouts even as they are losing their jobs and homes.

But while the austerity measures in Greece have led to strikes and popular nationwide mobilizations, similar resistance is just beginning to coalesce in the United States.

Costas Panayotakis teaches sociology at the New York City College of Technology-City University of New York. He is an active member of the Professional Staff Congress, the union representing CUNY faculty members and professional staff.

GREECE SAYS CUT BACK, GREEKS SAY FIGHT BACK

Greek Prime Minister Giorgos Papandreou became the butt of jokes in February after he announced the debt-ridden country was essentially bankrupt and he planned to take draconian steps to cut its deficit. On television, mock commercials declared, "It's time for the poor to pay, the rich have paid enough." But beneath the humor was a strong current of resistance, and protests soon erupted.

Some of the first "austerity measures" hit the public sector: Wages would be cut by 8 percent or more, and pensions would kick in after 37 instead of 35 years of work. This brought thousands of workers into the streets of Athens on Feb. 10 and 24 for protests organized by the civil servants union. Their refusal to work brought the country to a standstill — halting trains, shuttering primary schools and universities and leaving hospitals open for emergency services only.

The protests escalated in March when private sector employees joined with public sector workers for a 48-hour general strike. Just as bus drivers and train operators refused to "leave the station," air-traffic control workers stopped all flights from entering or leaving the country. Banks, post offices and municipal buildings were closed, and even police and firemen, unable to strike, decided to hold a protest against further cuts in their already meager salaries. Not to be outdone, anarchists

dropped a banner from the Acropolis that read, "Take the Measures Back."

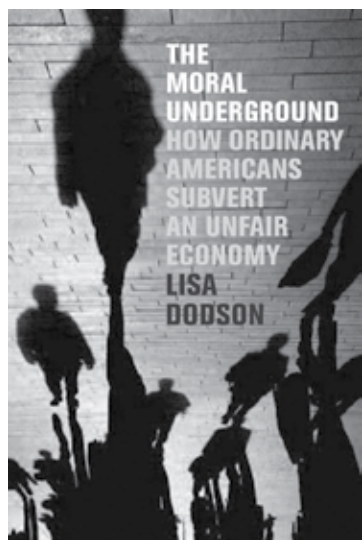
An estimated three million Greeks — out of a total population of 11 million — participated in the general strike, which spread beyond the capital city of Athens. Greece's second largest city, Thessaloniki, hosted six different marches — one of them attracting about 7,000 people who chanted, "Make the bosses pay!" In Ionnina about 1,500 people braved pouring rain to protest the measures. Demonstrators in Heracleion, Crete, blockaded shops that refused to allow their workers to strike.

The demonstrations were not without violence. Riot police used tear gas and batons in their attempt to suppress rock-throwing protesters. Many government buildings and banks had their windows smashed. At one point, radicals pushing for long-term strikes punched and kicked the head of Greece's main private-sector workers union before he was to address a crowd of strikers outside Parliament.

As *The Independent* went to press, another nationwide protest had been called for April 22 to oppose a loan by the International Monetary Fund and several European countries that could result in even further cutbacks and higher taxes.

— RENÉE FELTZ

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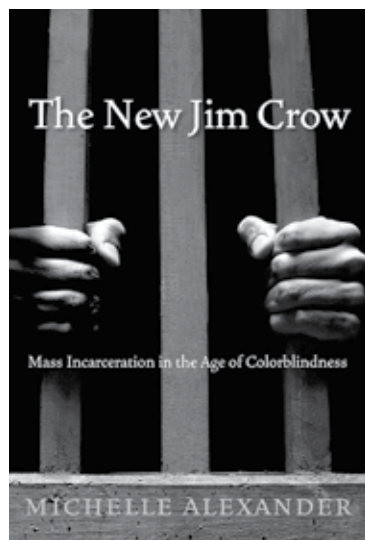
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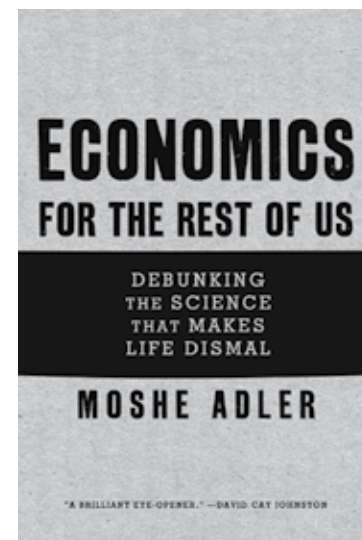
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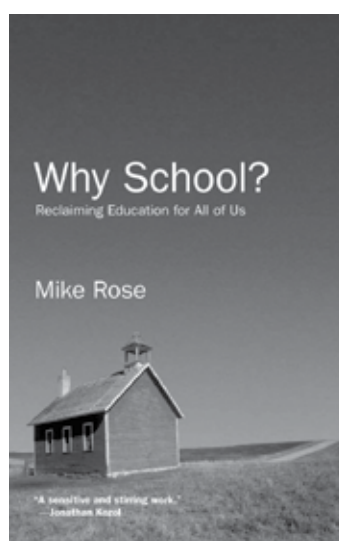
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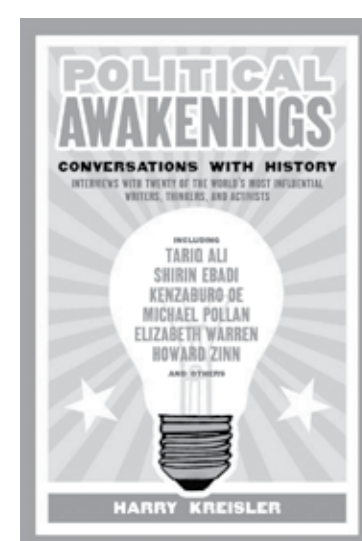


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REVIEW

SUGAR-COATED:

Jamie Oliver's 'Food Revolution' Is Camera-Ready,

Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution
 ABC PRODUCTIONS, TV SERIES

You've never seen a school lunch like this, one made with hydroponic vegetables and free-range chicken by a brash British "super chef." Not that the elementary schoolchildren care. Most sing-song "Pizza!" when given a choice between the gourmet grub and the reheated factory-made frozen pizza. At the end of the lunch period, a mound of chicken sits untouched, and even more is dumped into the trash after a few wary nibbles.

That much we know from watching *Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution*, a reality TV series now airing on ABC. But we're not supposed to know that Jamie is substituting high-end foodstuffs that normally grace three-star restaurants for the cheap, institutional fare dished out in public schools like West Virginia's Central City Elementary School, the setting for the first two episodes. It's an unsustainable recipe for budget-strapped schools.

At the end of one episode, Rhonda McCoy, director of food services for the local county, tells Oliver that he's over budget and did not meet the fat content and calorie guidelines, but she's going to let him continue with the "revolution" as long as he addresses these issues. What is not revealed is that "the meal cost at Central City Elementary during television production more than doubles with ABC Productions paying the excess expense," according to a document obtained by *Alternet* from the West Virginia Department of Education.

Oliver's self-anointed mission is to remake our eating habits for the better. Ground zero is Huntington, West Virginia. In an opening montage we are told the city of 50,000 "was recently named the unhealthiest city in America ... where nearly half of the adults are considered obese," and we see lardy folk shuffle through the frame.

While Oliver's efforts touch on many problems of school food — from overuse of processed foods to lack of funding — the *Food Revolution* is a failure because the entertainment narrative is unable to deal with complexities or systemic issues. Instead, all problems are reduced to individual stories and choices. The series sprinkles facts and hot-button issues into the mix, but what keeps the viewer hungering for more is the personal dramas and conflicts that are the staples of reality TV.

The reality behind the *Food Revolution* is that after the first two months of the new meals, children were overwhelmingly



DISTASTEFUL: Chef Jamie Oliver cooks for students at West Virginia's Central City Elementary School, featured in his reality TV series *Food Revolution*, airing on ABC. PHOTO COURTESY: BRITANNICA.COM

unhappy with the food, milk consumption plummeted and many students dropped out of the school lunch program. Food costs were way over budget, the district was saddled with other unmanageable expenses, and Oliver's failure to meet nutritional guidelines had school officials worried they would lose federal funding and that the state department of education would intervene. In short, the *Food Revolution* has flunked out.

Ultimately, Oliver picked the wrong target. Jan Poppendieck, author of *Free for All: Fixing School Food in America* (2010), says that individual school districts are not the root of the problem. She says children who participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) "are more likely to eat healthy food" than kids who don't. Participating children are more likely to consume "low or nonfat milk, fruits, vegetables and less likely to consume desserts, snacks, juice drinks and carbonated soda at lunch" than students who did not eat the federally subsidized lunches.

Still, there is an opportunity here. About 31.3 million schoolchildren participate daily in the NSLP, which served 5.2 billion meals in 2009 (62.5 percent of the

participants qualified for free or near-free meals). Many school systems are doing what they can, but school lunches are a sorry affair.

As it turns out, Oliver's *Food Revolution* is not so different from normal school fare. A complete breakdown of the first three weeks of his lunch meals included beef stew, spaghetti with meat sauce, sloppy joes, beef goulash, double thick cheesy pizza and beefy nachos. Students are not being given a choice between a mediocre lunch and fresh, organic cuisine. It's between a mediocre lunch and junk food. No one behind the show will confront this reality because ABC, Jamie Oliver and co-producer Ryan Seacrest profit handsomely from the processed- and junk-food industry either through advertising — more than \$15 billion in 2008 from 15 food companies — or in Oliver's case, endorsements.

To get students eating healthy local food, we would need to double school food funding, involve schoolchildren in growing and cooking their own food, ban junk-food advertising, slap a health tax on fast food, shift agribusiness subsidies to small, community-controlled farms, provide proper healthcare and nutrition education, and promote social and cultural

changes in how Americans approach food and exercise. But this would require a real revolution, not one manufactured for television.

FAT MOUNTAIN

The mantra of *Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution* is "choice." But America's ever-expanding waistline is a symptom of widespread poverty, sedentary lifestyles, junk-food marketing, a lack of healthcare, corporate control of food, the prevalence of cheap and addictive food, and subsidies that make meats and sugars cheaper than whole fruits and vegetables. These factors make choice more of a construct. Many people opt for flavor-intense, highly processed, calorie-dense food because it's cheaper and easier than cooking healthy foods from scratch.

Oliver tries to tackle this problem by offering free cooking classes. Being reality TV, however, his kitchen is also a stage set to roll out the Edwards, presumably the tubbiest family in town, by trying to teach them healthy cooking. In the process, he presents the Edwards with a golden-brown grease pyramid that accounts for the family's weekly consumption (and their 350-pound 12-year-old child). It's a warmed-over intervention narra-

But Is It a Recipe for Healthy Schools?

tive — setup, confrontation, confession, breakdown and makeover — served up to millions of viewers.

What health “makeover” shows like Oliver’s do, argue scholars Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, is remake social welfare within a “market logic that values entrepreneurialism, mass customization and profit accumulation” so that “people who are floundering can and must be taught to develop and maximize their capacities for normalcy, happiness, material stability, and success rather than rely on a public ‘safety net.’”

‘BREAKFAST PIZZA’

Meanwhile, many districts have been trying to make the best of a bad situation. Given severe funding constraints and conflicting guidelines, there is an economic and nutritional logic to serving pizza and flavored milk for breakfast, as we see Central City Elementary do in the very first episode.

Dr. Harris, co-director of West Virginia University’s Health Research Center, says, “The standard school foods they show are far healthier than they appear. The French fries are baked, not fried. The pizza and other breads are typically made with whole-grain products.”

That the school serves breakfast at all is an example of West Virginia’s efforts to raise the standards. Richard J. Goff, the executive director of the state Office of Child Nutrition, says it “is the first state in the nation to mandate that breakfast must be offered to children in all schools.” He also notes that in 2008 the state enacted “the most progressive nutrition standards in the nation,” guidelines established by the Institute of Medicine.

So the “breakfast pizza” is probably more nutritious than what students would eat otherwise, assuming their parents were able to feed them breakfast. The median household income in Huntington is about 55 percent of the U.S. average, and a phenomenal 86 percent of the children at Central City Elementary qualify for free or near-free meals because of widespread poverty there.

These schools are being blamed for a broken-down system. Oliver says nothing about food advertising aimed at children, or how corporate control of food squeezes out the small, local producers he claims to value. Perhaps it’s because he pockets nearly \$2 million a year shilling for Sainsbury’s, one of the United Kingdom’s largest grocers.

CUSTOMERS OR STUDENTS?

Budgeting issues are another reason Central City Elementary uses processed foods. The federal government reimburses schools just

\$2.68 for lunches and \$1.46 for breakfasts for children who qualify as long as the food meets specific guidelines. Goff says schools in Cabell County “cook from scratch 50 percent of the time,” and “50 percent of the cost to produce a meal is ... labor. It’s ... hard to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables. You pay a premium for those.”

For breakfast, Central City has perhaps 60 cents to buy the food for a government-approved, reimbursable meal. Try buying breakfast for 60 cents; it won’t even get you a Snickers bar.

The federal government only reimburses schools for what they actually serve. As Goff says, “You have to prepare foods and menus that children are going to eat or you’re defeating the purpose.” Boosting student participation increases food budgets in two ways: It lowers the costs of meals by creating greater economies of scale, and more meals sold means a higher percentage of money goes toward purchasing food ingredients; labor, equipment and administration are mostly fixed costs.

Accordingly, school systems try to maximize revenue by catering to children’s tastes formed by the fast-food industry; hence, pizza, chicken nuggets and fries are on the menu. Poppendieck says schools treat students as “customers,” driving “the menu toward what appeals to kids.”

One solution she proposes is making school lunches free for all students. Another: increasing the reimbursement rate. The Child Nutrition Act currently before the U.S. Senate would increase funding by an “extra 6 cents per meal per student for schools that meet new, stricter nutrition guidelines.” But Poppendieck says this could “backfire,” since “raising the standards without increasing the amount of resources may drive schools out of the program.”

JAMIE FLUNKS OUT

Even with an unlimited budget, Jamie failed to design a menu that provided a minimum number of calories without exceeding the fat limits. A nutritional analysis of the first three weeks of meals (15 lunches) at Central City Elementary conducted by the West Virginia Board of Education flunked Jamie on both counts. Eighty percent of his lunches exceeded either the total fat or saturated fat allowance — in most cases, both — and 40 percent of his lunches provided too few calories.

A document from the West Virginia Department of Education indicates Jamie’s escapades put Cabell County’s entire lunch program at risk: “Noncompliance with meal pattern and nutrient standard re-

quirements may result in a recovery of federal funds,” meaning that the county could lose a large amount of funding because of the failure to meet the standards.

School meals must meet two sets of standards to be reimbursable. One, they must provide a minimum amount of proteins, minerals, vitamins and calories. Two, meals must contain a maximum of 30 percent of calories from fat and 10 percent from saturated fat. (The first set of standards was established during World War II when there was a fear of shortages; the second was put in place during the 1980s when fat-phobia came into fashion.)

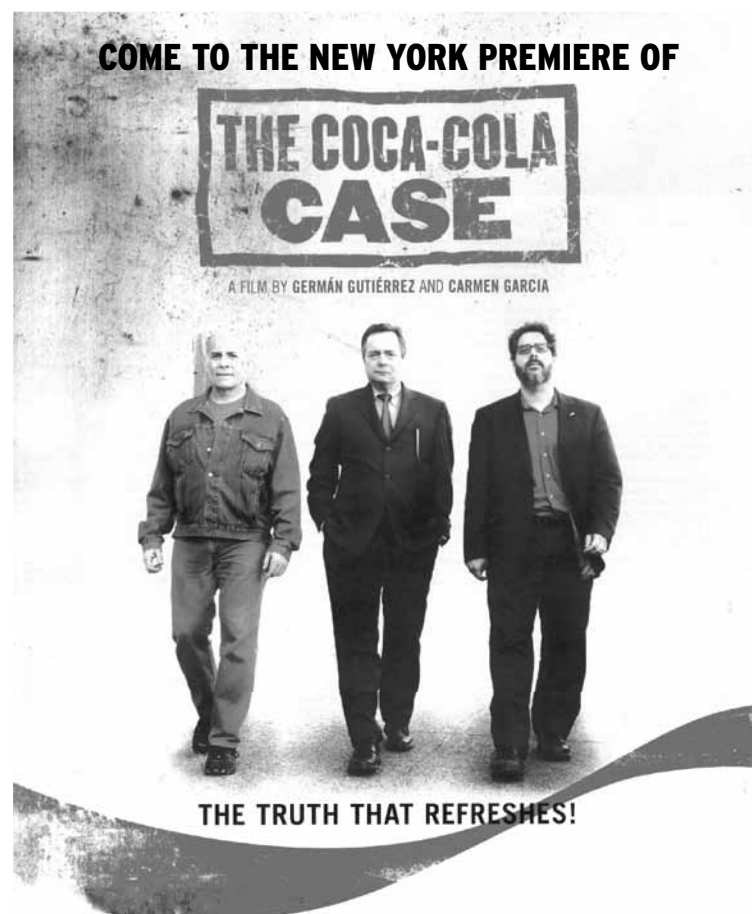
While Oliver raised \$80,000 to pay for trainers to teach cooks in Cabell County’s 28 schools to produce the new menus, a county document outlined many other expenses that have not been detailed on the show. Meal preparation required more cooks to the tune of \$66,000 annually; each school needed new equipment, ranging from \$20 containers to \$2,945 commercial-grade food processors; the county was paying more for fresher items, such as chicken at an additional 10 cents a serving; and schools that rolled over to the new program were unable to use “donated food” from the United States Department of Agriculture, valued at \$522,974 last year. Officials bluntly noted, “The program cannot afford to lose this amount.”

In a perverse way, Jamie Oliver has highlighted many of the shortcomings of the U.S. food system. But his “revolution” is like taking a wrecking ball to a termite-infested house, smashing the structure to show the rot inside. Some will try to find the silver lining by acknowledging that Oliver is raising the flawed school food program as a national concern. This is true, but he’s so far done it in a way that gives little understanding of the complexity of the issue. Furthermore, the record of the entertainment industry successfully addressing social and political issues is rather barren: better activist-oriented features such as *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Sicko* were unable to move the needle.

By the time Oliver has moved on to his next million-dollar project, the teachers, students, parents, farmers, administrators and community activists fighting to overhaul the school food system will still be on the ground, doing the hard work. Perhaps Oliver should have focused on how their struggle for a grassroots food revolution, rather than hogging the limelight.

—ARUN GUPTA

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The Film the Coca-Cola Co. Tried to Censor

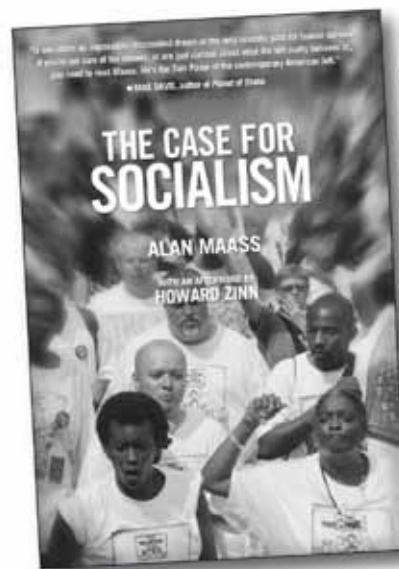
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BY DR. NORMAN FINKELSTEIN
OR BOOKS, 2010

In recent weeks, eyes around the world have been riveted on the standoff between the Obama administration and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the continuing construction of Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem.

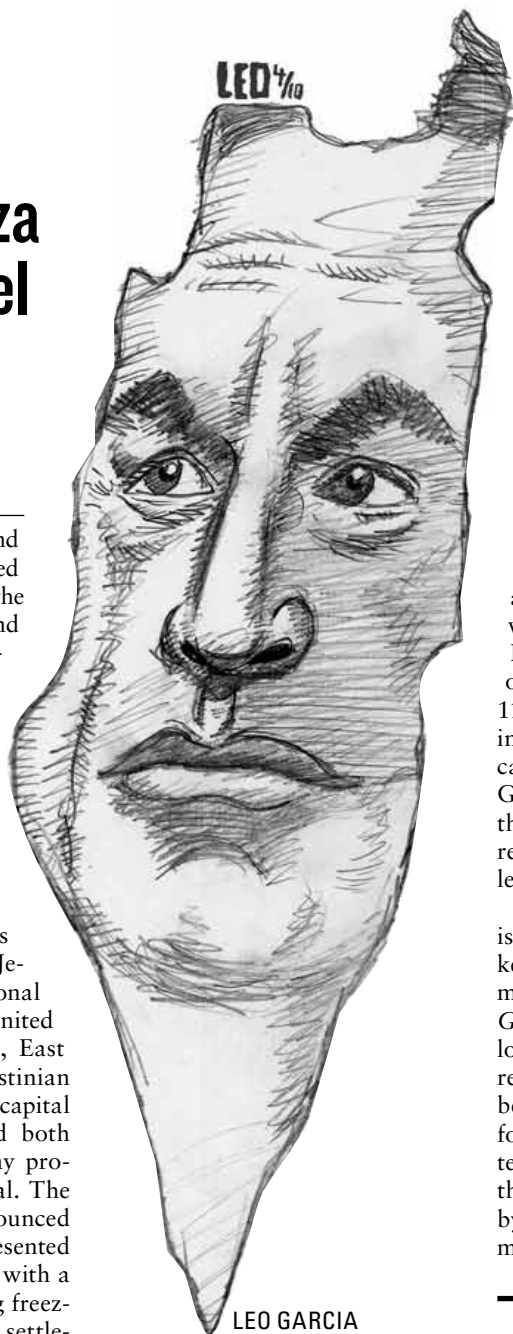
The dispute started when, as U.S. Vice President Joe Biden was visiting, Israel's Interior Ministry announced plans to build 1,600 new units of Jewish housing in East Jerusalem. Under international law, and according to the United States (at least in rhetoric), East Jerusalem is occupied Palestinian territory and the future capital of a Palestinian state, and both existing settlements and any prospective new ones are illegal. The Obama administration denounced the plan and has since presented the Netanyahu government with a series of demands, including freezing construction of the new settlements.

While much of the media has focused on the standoff and its implications for the "peace process," less attention has been paid to the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip. Gaza, which is run by the democratically elected Islamist party Hamas, is under a crippling blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt. The 1.5 million Palestinians in the tiny coastal strip are also dealing with the aftermath of the devastating 2008–2009 Israeli assault on Gaza, which killed nearly 1,400 Palestinians, the majority of them civilians.

To Dr. Norman Finkelstein, an Israel/Palestine scholar as renowned as he is controversial, that invasion (dubbed "Operation Cast Lead" by the Israeli military) marked a turning point in how many Americans and Jews view Israel. "Public opinion now is ready to be reached. There's a recognition that there's something seriously awry in Israel," Finkelstein told *The Independent* in a February interview.

The son of Holocaust survivors of the Warsaw ghetto, Finkelstein has been a tireless, outspoken advocate for the Palestinians since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. He is both revered by supporters of the Palestinian solidarity movement and demonized by supporters of Israel as a "self-hating Jew," among other epithets. Even among moderate supporters of a two-state solution, he elicits strong responses, not all of them positive.

Despite his expertise, Finkelstein has been marginalized in the mainstream debate on Israel/Palestine. He has endured a turbulent career in academia, most



LEO GARCIA

mented and burning with righteous anger, and he still devotes enough pages to developing a solid framework of historical context and critical analysis to give newcomers to this complex subject a working knowledge of the conflict's dimensions.

When it comes to Israel, the political is always personal for Finkelstein, and facts and figures that anchor his research are humanized by accounts of his experience on the ground. In a moving passage, he describes visiting Gaza as part of a CODE-PINK delegation in the aftermath of the Israeli assault, recalling an 11-year-old Palestinian girl lingering beside the demolished American International School. I visited Gaza and observed that very spot; the American International School remained in ruin, with only rubble left over.

'This Time We Went Too Far' is hardly light fare, though. Finkelstein saves an important commentary on the much-maligned *Goldstone Report* for the epilogue. Richard Goldstone, a highly respected South African jurist, has been demonized by the Israel lobby for his charge that Israel committed "war crimes," in a report on the Gaza invasion commissioned by the U.N. His devastating indictment has earned him opponents

across the political spectrum. (Alan Dershowitz, once a friend, made headlines when he called Goldstone an "evil, evil man" for his "despicable" report and he was a "traitor" to the Jewish people.)

Finkelstein argues that the publication of the report marks the "end of an apologetic Jewish liberalism that denies or extenuates Israel's crimes" and "the emergence of a new era in which the human rights dimension of the Israel-Palestine conflict move[s] center-stage." This point reflects one of the book's central messages: "This book ... sets forth grounds for hope. The bloodletting in Gaza has roused the world's conscience. The prospects have never been more propitious for galvanizing the public not just to mourn but also to act."

What's missing from *This Time* is the voice of the Palestinian people. Finkelstein's arguments would have benefitted from the powerful testimony Palestinians gave before the Goldstone mission. Also absent in is an adequate discussion of the growing "Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions" (BDS) movement against Israeli policy, a perfect example of the shift in discourse surrounding Israel/Palestine. Post-Gaza, the BDS movement has grown and received more international attention than ever before — an affirmation of Finkelstein's

view that the world's perception of the Israel/Palestine conflict is undergoing a sea change.

The time is now to push for a lasting and just solution to the conflict. But Finkelstein's emphasis on the "international consensus" to solve the conflict is problematic. It is true that international law, the United Nations, human-rights groups and the Arab states surrounding Israel all agree on what a just settlement would be: a two-state solution based on full Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders and a "just" solution to the Palestinian refugee crisis. But with 500,000 settlers on Palestinian land, an illegal separation barrier that has effectively annexed a portion of the West Bank, a suffocating blockade of the Gaza Strip, and a scary rightward shift inside Israel, some have renewed the call for a one-state solution to the conflict. The facts on the ground make the campaign for international consensus implausible — more of an obstacle than a stepping stone to a solution. What's needed now is the kind of unapologetic debate Finkelstein himself has always stood for, and to which *'This Time We Went Too Far'* is yet another major contribution.

—ALEX KANE

May Day Events: BOOKS, BIKES AND BIZARRE FAMILY SCENES

BY IRINA IVANOVA

On May 1, join New York's radical environmental organization Time's Up! as they lead a bike ride from Union Square South to Brooklyn Museum's free monthly party (both the ride and party happen the first Saturday of every month; the party includes music, dancing, film screenings, and free entrance to all exhibits). This month's "First Saturday" ride, setting off at 6:30 pm, commemorates Miami cyclist Christophe Le Canne, who was tragically killed in a hit-and-run this past January.

The Bushwick gallery SUGAR is exhibiting "A Sense of Humor" through May 8. Nearly all photographs on display date from the 19th or 20th century, reflecting the "elegant documentary" style typified by Robert Doisneau and Elliott Erwitt, both with works on display. Humor is rare in documentary photography, and the results here are winning with topics like nudity, animals and bizarre family scenes. On May 2, art appraiser John Adam Staszyn discusses the photographs' unique humor.

The New York chapter of Books Through Bars (BTB) recently relocated to the basement of Freebird Books & Goods, an excellent bookstore in Red Hook. On May 8, BTB hosts an inaugural book drive and BBQ in their backyard. Preferred: books on history, radical politics;



My Cousin Simone, Marly Forest, 1913
Jacques Henri Lartigue, gelatin silver print

dictionaries/thesauruses, language instruction; poetry. The event is free; monetary donations are welcome (proceeds cover postage).

DETAILS:
"A Sense of Humor"
through May 8, discussion May 2, SUGAR,
449 Troutman Street, Bushwick,
sugarbushwick.com, 718-417-1180

Time's Up! Miami Solidarity Ride:
May 1, 6:30 pm, Union Square South;
times-up.org/calendar

Books Through Bars book drive:
May 8, 2-6 pm,
Freebird Books
123 Columbia Street, Red Hook
freebirdbooks.com, 718-643-8484

Never Mind the Afterlife

MALCOLM MCLAREN REMEMBERED

Former Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren, a cultural-political prankster and scam artist who helped set off the worldwide phenomenon of punk-rock, died April 8 of cancer. He was 64.

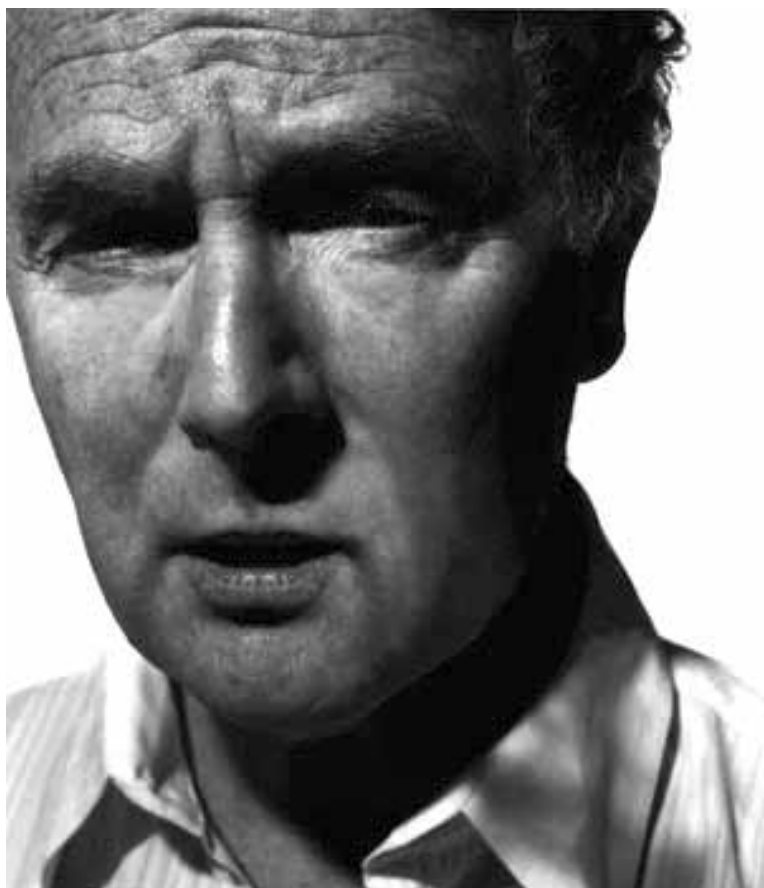
McLaren drew his inspiration from an eccentric combination of revolutionary politics and shock-value fashion, from the French uprising of May 1968 and the way 1950s rock'n'roll appalled adult society. He synthesized this provocation through style with a series of shops in London, selling '50s rocker clothes, fetishwear and his own designs.

In 1975, he went to New York to manage the New York Dolls, the bridge between Chuck Berry/Rolling Stones rock'n'roll and the punk of the future. But the Dolls were on their last legs from heroin, alcohol and the macho rock audience's rejection of an act that dressed in drag. McLaren's costuming them in red leather and communist symbols didn't revive them.

Still, the city's nascent punk scene inspired him, and he returned to London with a hatful of schemes. Primary among these was facilitating a band out of some of the youths who hung around his store, Sex. The name Sex Pistols was "imagery contrived to strike treble terror into the hearts of the slack-jawed public — fucking, violence, and an advertisement for Malcolm's shop," wrote punker-than-thou rock critics Julie Bur-chill and Tony Parsons.

The Sex Pistols exploded into nationwide controversy in December 1976. Called in as last-minute substitutes on a TV talk show, they overdid the green room wine, and the host goaded them into calling him a "dirty fucker." McLaren scored his "cash from chaos" as tabloid headlines screamed, "THE FILTH AND THE FURY," and the band got \$300,000 from the record labels that dropped them.

A few months later, the Pistols' second single, "God Save the Queen," hit number two in the British charts despite a BBC ban. Released just before Queen Elizabeth II's 25th-anniversary jubilee, it featured lyrics like, "The fascist



regime/It made you a moron" and "There's no future in England's dreaming."

Maintaining the pose was costly, however. Lead caterwauler John "Johnny Rotten" Lydon, a smart, contrarian, working-class youth, acutely resented McLaren's Sven-gali act. The band played only semi-secret shows in Britain, to keep up the illusion that they were banned. Bassist Glen Matlock, whose music complemented the cruder style of guitarist Steve Jones, was fired for being a middle-class Beatles fan. He was replaced by Sid Vicious, a minimally skilled junkie who'd swallowed the myth that self-destruction was glamorous.

Lydon quit at the end of a brief U.S. tour in January 1978. McLaren had the Pistols play places like San Antonio and Oklahoma City instead of New York and Los Angeles. Lydon's last words at their final show were, "Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?"

McLaren took the other members to Brazil to cut a record with fugitive train robber Ronald Biggs.

The B-side featured the soon-to-OD Sid Vicious, singing a hilariously sick version of the smug corporate anthem "My Way."

McLaren's 1980s ventures included Bow Wow Wow, who celebrated home taping and a pop-Zerzanist primitivism over Burundi-beat drumming, and recording a hip-hop-styled version of the 19th-century folk tune "Buffalo Gals." In 1999, he ran for mayor of London, advocating having the homeless sell lottery tickets to fund housing, an official Buy Nothing Day and putting legal brothels across the street from Parliament.

The Sex Pistols' breakup resulted in lengthy and bitter litigation, in which Lydon accused McLaren of stiffing him for royalties. But after McLaren's death, Lydon remembered the outrageousness they shared.

"Malc was always entertaining and I hope you remember that," Lydon said in a statement. "I will miss him, and so should you."

—STEVE WISHNIA

Secret Sounds of Iran

No One Knows About Persian Cats
DIRECTED BY BAHMAN GHOBADI
A PRODUCTION OF MIJ FILM CO., 2009
IN FARSI WITH ENGLISH TITLES
OPENING APRIL 16
INDEPENDENT FILM CENTER,
323 SIXTH AVENUE (AT W. THIRD STREET)



tor Bahman Ghobadi.

The vibrant, exciting — and quite illegal — underground music scene in Tehran is the real star of *No One Knows About Persian Cats*, the stereotype-shattering new film by Kurdish direc-

Iran's Muslim law frowns on "decadent" music in general, rock music in particular, and especially the sight and sounds of women singing in public, all of which it regards as what could be described

as "occasions of sin." Yet scores — perhaps hundreds — of young Iranians are forming bands with women up front, making rock music, performing in hidden venues, and, when it all gets too hard, trying to leave Iran altogether for someplace where they can play freely. *No One Knows About Persian Cats* follows musicians Negar (Negar Shaghghi) and Ashkan (Ashkan Koshanejad) as they try to put a band together and acquire the passports and visas — forged — that will get them out of Tehran if they fail.

—JUDITH MAHONEY PASTERNAK

For full review see indypendent.org

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As consumers take environmentalism into their own hands, a dynamic green marketplace has emerged. But do today's much touted "green" products—carbon offsets, organic food, biofuels, and eco-friendly cars and homes—really work? Implicit in these efforts to go green is the simple promise that global warming can be stopped by swapping out "dirty" goods for "clean" ones. Yet in increasingly urgent times of ecological crisis how do we advance more deeply rooted changes that can truly protect the planet?

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Healthcare Explained Continued from page 6

THE REAL REVOLUTION?

All of this is so complex that it will take four years just to put the basic elements in place. But it's quite possible that a generation from now, the most talked-about elements of Obamacare will be looked upon as merely a stop-gap while the real revolution in healthcare law played itself out. The new law also spawns a host of small-scale programs, demonstration projects, studies, and research efforts designed to shift the focus on American healthcare from managing illness to preventing it and from rewarding the provision of service — whatever the outcome — to rewarding efficient, high-quality care.

"A lot of the focus has been on the expansion of coverage, because it's the easiest to talk about," Weinberg said. "But a substantial part of it is delivery system reforms, getting people the right care at the right time for the right price."

Obamacare could begin to move the United States to a more "evidence-based" decision-making model through a trio of new agencies: the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation, the Independent Payment Advisory Board and the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute. As corporate control loosens, the factors that determine which new drug or procedure or prosthetic device is approved and which is rejected will become more rational and transparent, and the public will have a stronger say in the kind of healthcare system it gets. This, rather than "socialized" medicine, is what free-market fetishists are really afraid of.

RETURN OF THE PUBLIC OPTION

The problem, of course, is that the United States is not Europe. Given

the decade or so that it will take for the new system to evolve, the healthcare industry could well get control of the process. "The insurance companies will be looking to game the system five ways to Sunday," predicts Roger Hickey, co-director of the Campaign for America's Future, which supported the bill but criticizes many of its features.

Another problem is that Obamacare does nothing to untangle what remains a confusing and splintered healthcare establishment.

"It's ironic that there's all of this public freakout about government 'taking over' healthcare when it really just builds on existing systems," Weinberg said. "Now, we're going to have universal coverage, but it's split up between different care systems: Medicare, Medicaid, employer-based and individual insurance systems."

There's no guarantee the situation will improve. The new law does nothing to curb the monopolies that pharmaceutical and medical technology companies enjoy and that drive up the cost of care. In fact, to get biotech companies to go along with the reform, the final bill stretches out their patent protections and throws in a helping of new tax credits for product research and development.

Because the new health insurance exchanges will be set up and administered by the states, the quality, price and comprehensiveness of coverage are bound to vary. Some states will require a more complete package of benefits. Some will regulate the premiums insurers can charge more strictly.

The central flaw of the new system is that it attempts to channel this new entitlement through the private sector, subjecting people's needs at every turn to the imperative to generate maximum profit.

But what if that makes a public option to private insurance — or even a full-fledged single-payer, European-style insurance system — more attractive? One of the events that propelled the Patient Protection Act over the line in its final weeks was the announcement that insurance giant Anthem Blue Cross would be raising rates in California by as much as 39 percent, prompting howls of outrage.

"Insurance companies are likely to keep raising rates on a regular basis," Hickey said. "That, more than anything else, will help us progressives to push for a public option. It's the result of the inevitable dynamic of the insurance companies pissing people off."

One irony of the healthcare debate was that the public liked the public option, opinion polls consistently found. Only healthcare providers and the lawmakers they patronized didn't, but the latter had the leverage. But although Democrats agreed not to include a public option in the final bill, they didn't completely shut the door on it.

Starting in 2017, states will be able to apply to the Secretary of Health and Human Services for a waiver allowing them to create a public option, provided it's at least as comprehensive and affordable as the system based on health-insurance exchanges. If a few of these materialize, they could spur demand for a public option available nationally.

That's one possible road stretching out from the new law. The private healthcare industry, it's safe to say, will be drawing another.

Eric Laursen, an independent journalist, has been covering healthcare and pensions for more than two decades.

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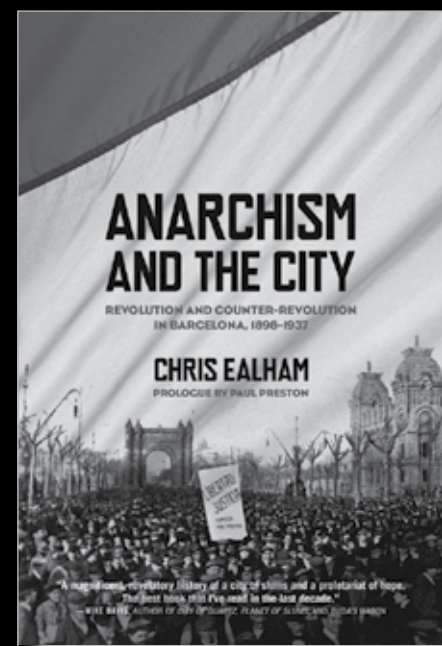
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